The Cult of Deficient Thinking

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 2, Number 2 March/April 1978

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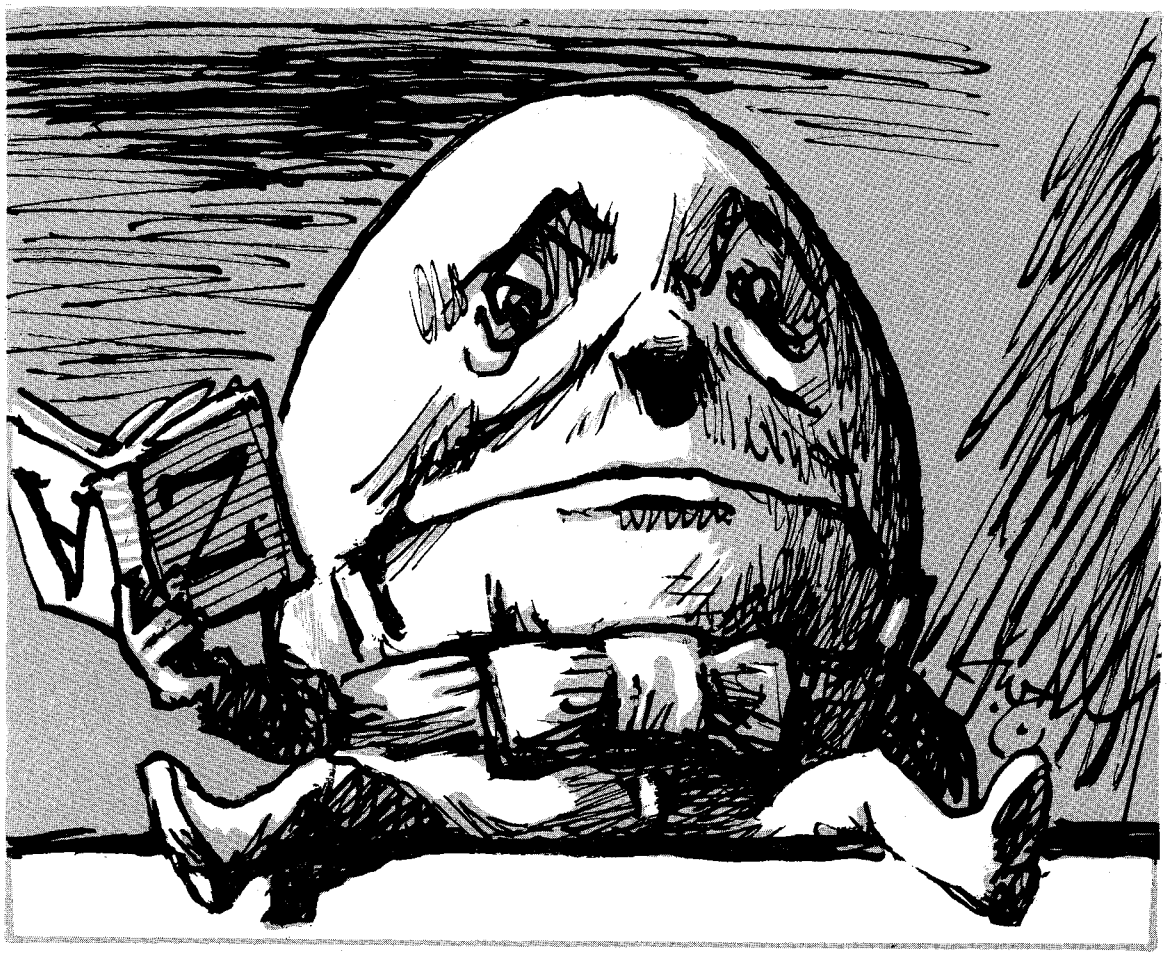

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean— neither more nor less."

—Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There
by Lewis Carroll

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Comment

I see the Liberal Culture as resting on many mighty pillars, one of the most powerful of which is the cult of deficient thinking.

The symptoms of the latter are everywhere. Its effect is the erosion of the American ethos, that is of the set of principles and values by which this nation *wishes* to live. Even if America's efforts have fallen short then and now, in making this wish come true, this wish has always conditioned America's fortunes as an *ideal* worth striving for.

Its disintegration has many causes, of which the most disturbing is, perhaps, the perversion of freedom. Freedom is America's element, a sort of force of nature, with all the blessings and unpredictability of naturalness. An extremist approach to freedom, however, brings more harm than good: it is as if we imagined precipitation as not only a fertilizer of crops, but as something we are constitutionally forbidden to take shelter from. Freedom converted into licentiousness threatens the fabric of organized life; all we need is common sense to tell us this. In the '60s, freedom as an absolute brought us a specific moral vacuousness, or permissiveness, as a proclaimed beneficence. Many saw in it a breeding ground for "new" virtues. "New virtues?" Saul Bellow wondered not long ago in *To Jerusalem and Back,* "Are there any?" Neither theorists nor practitioners of the Liberal Culture could have answered his question, "New" virtues is a classic construct of deficient thinking. Integrity, truthfulness, independence of mind, loyalty, heroism are as old as mankind and nothing indicates their obsoleteness.

The cult of deficient thinking is a complex phenomenon. Its ubiquity makes it unassailable. Neither formal knowledge, nor moral courage, not even wisdom, is sufficient to expose it clearly and irrefutably. One of the few effective weapons against it is common sense—that is the human faculty to be adamant that 2 and 2 makes 4 not 5. Common sense is the only litmus instrumental in debunking deficient thinking and its cultists. This is why the Liberal Culture is hellbent on eradicating common sense from the face of the earth; it denigrates and villifies it at each step, and calls it the low-brow philosophy of rednecks.

Some areas of social actuality have gathered more of the cult's intoxicating dust than others. Let's have a look at them.

Until recently, man and woman shared both an existence and the human condition. The code of their interdependence has, through the millenia, been ratified by *both* nature and civilization. Recently, the code was declared invalid and replaced with a separateness of goals: the basic premise of modern feminism is that man and woman *can* exist without one another. The divorce of destinies is supposed to bring *absolute* parity, thus improvement of humanity.

Common sense whispers into our souls that this is deficient thinking; that, in the end, it will terminate the mutual *need* which man feels for woman, and vice versa. This need has always been the non-biological DNA, the source of human life on this planet. Men and women have always known that it is difficult to live *with* one another and impossible *without.* It is a self-evident truth and its denial drowns us in grotesque abominations. However, countless books and movies promote this aberration daily in print and on the airwaves: they intensely advocate the abrogation of the sexes, while serious critics recommend their messages as a panacea for man's and woman's ills. A fallacy originating in fantasies has been molded into an almost compulsory belief and is being injected into minds. The deception is so gross, and its promoters are so shrill, that it can be categorized neither as faith, nor as idea—only as cult.

Under the Liberal Culture's sway, social morality has become a paradise of deficient thinking. After the demise of sin, accused of having been just a figment of religiosity, the ultimate relativization of guilt turned big cities into jungles—a metaphor unfair to the latter, for no one purposelessly takes life in a jungle. The cultists assume that a scientifically prescribed morality can legislate consciences, they worship the academic Baal on every TV talk show. In the light of this ethic, and according to its frequent social implementations, both Lady Macbeth and Raskolnikov, for example, would be unpunishable if their crimes were uncovered with the help of unauthorized bugging. More liberal courts may even deem Shakespeare's and Dostoyevski's literary imagination a fully inappropriate device to opine on what's guilt; in such a case we have to assume that both the Scottish lady and the Russian student would have been acquitted. And common sense tells us that there is something oddly deficient in this approach to morality and law.

In a recent story, *Time*—that stronghold of listless objectivity in socio-moral matters—reported on the unheard-of crimes that are being committed daily in American high schools, once the incubators of civic virtues. The magazine ascribed the anarchy of conduct and atrophy of humaneness to the downfall of authority in the '60s. But it does not mention that *ideas*—especially moral ones—brought about this collapse. Those were half-baked, callow, meretricious concepts of liberation, right and wrong, individual conscience as the supreme guidance. They were promoted by specious "philosophers" and "moralists," who, in turn, were given frenetic advertisement in the pages of *Time.* It was cheap and easy to become a "spiritual leader" in those times; it sufficed to climb a soap box and shout: "War is Evil!" or: "People Are Beautiful!" or anything equally profound and revealing, to earn the cheers of spaced-out crowds, and the enthusiastic reports of the national magazines. The leaders and crowds vanished, but the sleazy ideas have stayed with us, and today they flourish in the nation's high schools, and give rise to the crudest violence a society in peace has ever known. Those who preached such ideas still call themselves liberals, or radicals, today, and are still venerated by *Time* for their never-ending quest for the perfectibility of

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man to be achieved through equating every possible wickedness and derangement with the common-sensical desire for normalcy and order. The result of their domination of culture is that vice and sin are among us to a degree unknown to previous generations. Many of them now have second thoughts, but they will still crucify anyone who would say that evil and decency cannot have an equal footing in a society that wants to survive and remain free. Common sense warns us that their thinking is deficient and leads to a disaster which may destroy us all, the cultists included.

In other fields of intellectual endeavors, the cult of deficient thinking rages with no less impunity. However monstrous and detailed the contrary evidence, the anti-American scholars, trained and paid by American universities, will incessantly come up with books proving that America is to be blamed for the Cold War. Some concede that the guilt is on both sides. Rash is the academic who would dare to admit that it is Russia, and Russia alone, who initiated it, wanted it and needed it for mostly domestic reasons, although that proof can be found in every primer for the use of Soviet children, and the written testimony of non-liberal scholars whose literature on the subject could encircle the globe.

The anti-CIA paranoia, the paradigm of deficient thinking, performed and practiced by the foremost and best respected press organs in the country, turns on occasion into a parody of the primary rules of reasoning. Some cultists of deficient thinking, highly-rated as beacons of liberal conscience, publicly demand that law enforcement and intelligence agencies keep watching only people guilty of misdeeds and betrayals. How those agencies can know without surveillance who's guilty of nasty things and who's not, the cultists do not explain. Now, even a village fool knows that to detect hidden wrongdoing one must sniff it out. A spy is a spy because he tells nobody who he is—this simple truth has been confirmed by both semantics and experience, other comportment would indicate another profession. Intentional murderers are not ostentatious, because an openness could interfere with their intentions. However, the cultists do not notice that in Russia for any citizen to be bugged means an impending trip to a gulag regardless of what was discovered by the procedure. While in America, Ms. Bella Abzug, once justly bugged because her ardors for Stalin kept proper authorities in suspense as to what she was *really* doing, has made a political career out of being bugged, rising to membership in Congress.

Now—here is a difference. The cultists of deficient thinking may not notice it, and this is why their mental processes seem defective. But common sense tells us that something in this situation is hopelessly twisted and falsified. After all, we have developed enough through centuries of civilization, culture and literature to perceive that Abel might have avoided death if he had had foreknowledge of Cain's designs. And that Abel's move to obtain such advance recognition by any means at his disposal would have appeared moral, proper and wise in the eyes of both God and man, for he was good and his heart was pure.

To review books in America one of the following is presumed to suffice:

1) the good will of an editor who commissions and publishes reviews;
2) a degree in English and/or an academic position (both useful but not necessary);
3) literary expertise.

The first is a matter of metaphysics, as the benevolence of others is an enigmatic factor of existence. The second is meaningless for this objective. The third one is automatically acquired by being published, regardless of one's talent, knowledge, education and intelligence. The mere fact that one's name is printed under a review gives one an aura of an expert on literary matters. And as the magic of a by-line depends on the whim of an editor, we are back to square one and can safely presume that book reviewing in America is determined merely by journalistic *fiat.*

However, we believe that, if someone wants to review books, he or she should be asked:

1) whether or not he/she realizes that passing judgments on books involves both moral and intellectual responsibility;
2) whether or not he/she defends any values grounded in moral and civic criteria, as only the readiness to defend values qualifies someone who writes about books as a critic;
3) whether or not he/she realizes that reviewing books means shaping opinion and, therefore, to exercise it honestly, one must perform it with a sense of public service.

We, at the *Chronicles of Culture,* think that a review, in order to serve culture, has to meet intellectual, moral and civic criteria. Failing those standards, both its social role and cultural worth, look pitiable.

—Leopold Tyrmand

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Opinions & Views

Those Dying Generations

Michael Herr: *Dispatches;* Alfred A. Knopf Co.; New York, 1977.

by Stephen R. Maloney

The Scottish poet and critic Edwin Muir observed that one could almost say that Troy fell so that a poem—the *Iliad*—might be written. On the evidence of Michael Herr's *Dispatches* and other works dealing with the recent debacle in Southeast Asia, one almost imagines that Saigon fell so that a gaggle of literary journalists might say in chorus, "We told you so!"

However much *Dispatches* concentrates on Vietnam, it is only marginally *about* war. Let me explain. If Homer had composed the *Iliad* without reference to the abduction of Helen, if he had neglected Achilles and emphasized Ajax, if he had eliminated all mention of the gods and goddesses, if he excised all evidence of *hamartia* and *hybris,* not to mention homeland and honor, what would have remained? A Greek version of *Dispatches.* Mr. Herr's book is thus *about* war only in the sense that a textbook on logical positivism is about life.

Like so much of the American journalism dealing with the Vietnam War, *Dispatches* is basically a set of literary formulae—mainly those of literary naturalism—masquerading as Ultimate Realism. Herr gives us sounds, sights and smells—a Viet Cong soldier hung up on barbed wire, a pile of "body bags" smashed into gore and human pulp by a mortar shell, a stinking latrine, a necklace fashioned from Viet Cong ears, a soldier horribly wounded and dying alone. But he does not give us any sustained analysis of the war. For him North and South, Communism and democracy, freedom and servitude, remain pallid abstractions in a bloody world.

Some conservative reviewers see *Dispatches* as merely chanting the same old refrain, "Hell no, we won't go." And Herr certainly does drag out some old stock figures from the *Comédie Indochine:* the Marine colonel who tells the press about the boys at Khe Sahn: "Men, those Marines are *clean."* We see again the fabled officer—was he from the Phoenix brigade?—who wanted to destroy the village in order to save it. My favorite *Dispatches* original is "the colonel who had a plan to shorten the war by dropping piranha into the paddies of the North."

But Herr is not Dr. Spock; he is—of all people—Walter Pater, the Victorian aesthete and amoralist who came to value sensations above all else. Pater once summed up his goal: "to burn like a hard gem-like flame." Similarly, life after the War is, for Herr, only a remembrance of excitement past.

> "Of course, coming back [to peaceful America] was a down. After something like that, what could you find to thrill you, what compared, what did you do for a finish? Everything seemed a little dull . . . You missed the scene, missed the grunts and the excitement, the feeling you'd had in a place where no drama had to be invented, ever."

Dispatches strongly implies that young correspondents came to Vietnam in large part to escape from dullness. Take Tim Page, Herr's photographer-friend who was seriously wounded. Recuperating, Page was asked by a British publisher to write a book that would once and for all "take the glamour out of war." Page replies, "Take the glamour out of war! I mean, how the bloody hell can you do that?" Or consider the son of swashbuckling Errol Flynn, Sean, a photographer attracted to war the way prostitutes are drawn to bars. Young Flynn takes on an almost symbolic role in *Dispatches*—the quintessence of coolness, of *savoir guerre,* of youth, living the role that his father merely played out on the silver screen.

Herr's youth, Flynn's youth, the average "grunt's" youth: this is the real theme of *Dispatches,* the superiority of youth. Herr does not dwell overmuch on the death of young soldiers—or on the death of Sean Flynn—because at least they died young men's death; they did not have to grow old.

Herr's journey through Vietnam often seems mainly a flight to avoid encountering anyone over 30—senior officers "seeing light at the end of the tunnel" (one tunnel-rat, a young Marine, asks haughtily, "What do they know about tunnels?"); corrupt civilian engineers, doubling their salaries on the black market and gunning their Hondas up and down the steps of a Vietnamese war memorial; and especially graying reporters, "the sort of old reporter that most young reporters I knew were afraid of becoming someday." The older reporters are Herr's Struldbruggs.

> "You'd run into them once in a while at the bar of the Danang press center, men in their late forties who hadn't had the chance to slip into uniform since V-J Day, exhausted and bewildered after all of those briefings and lightning visits, punchy from the sheer volume of facts that had been thrown on them, their tape recorders broken, their pens stolen by street kids, their time almost up."

The double meaning of the last clause is probably intentional. For aging is a form of death and moral decay in Herr's vision. In contrast, the young reporters are portrayed as a semi-mystic community that has eaten the forbidden fruit. "Where we were alike, we were really alike . . . we were the only ones who could tell, among ourselves, whether [our] work was any good." Reinforcing this impression of a closed, self-selected

Dr. Maloney, previously a professor of English poetry, works for Phillips Petroleum Company and wrote for a range of publications from Georgia Review *to* Fortune.

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community, Herr asks, "Who could you discuss politics with, except a colleague?" These (self-) chosen ones even shared the sacraments of the time, "grass, whiskey, girls . . . sources, information, hunches, tips, prestige."

The image of the young sharing a secret knowledge is reinforced by a statement Tim Page makes to Sean Flynn, "I ask you, would William C. Westmoreland dig the Mothers [of Invention, a rock group] or wouldn't he?" Rock music, the source of Herr's prose style, is a shibboleth that keeps out generals and other lesser (older) breeds without the beat.

But the exclusivity that begins with rejecting the old grows to include all others, grows into a pervasive egotism. Speaking of Tim Page, Herr says, "His talk was endlessly referential, he mixed in images from the war, history, rock, Eastern religion, his travel [the bathos is instructive], literature . . . but you came to see that he was really only talking about one thing, Page." And true also of Herr. His book only concerns others insofar as he sees his own reflection in them.

The theologican literary critic Walter Sullivan has described the kind of sensibility pervading a book like *Dispatches:* "The writer finds himself bereft of a moral frame within which to develop his characters and work out his plots. There is no place to start, there are no standards by which people can be judged: in a meaningless world there is no way to develop meaning."

Sullivan might have added that where the moral imagination leaks out, peer pressure—in the form of Herr's journalistic colleagues—rushes in. A writer who inhabits a world of sensations, of kicks, thrills and trips inevitably loses his power over words, because like Shakespeare's Falstaff discoursing on the word "honor" he sees words only as words—vocalized breaths. And so the hipster, the thrill-seeker ultimately lapses into silence. As one of Saul Bellow's characters puts it, "It was not the behavior that was gone. What was gone was the old words. Forms and signs were absent. Not honor, but the word honor."

Let us put it clearly and honorably: Herr, nominated for a National Book Award, featured by *Esquire,* uses words poorly. Let me illustrate. He is derivative: "It was August now, when the heat in I Corps forgave nothing." He is a wind machine of jargon and abstractions: "The spring-summer lull had left everyone badly strung out, and a lot of spooky stories began going around . . ." And he is clumsy in handling his one penetrating insight, the ambiguities engulfing the journalist-as-hero:

> "The only Vietnamese many of us [reporters] knew was the words 'Bao Chi! Bao Chi!—Journalist! Journalist!' or even 'Bao Chi Fap!—French Journalist!', which was the same as crying, Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

In short, the prose of *Dispatches* is a kind of self-indulgence. It is the voice of a man talking only to himself, a man who fits the description offered by J. Hillis Miller of one "wandering through the nothingness of his own ego."

To his credit, Herr is uncomfortably aware that the Vietnam Journalist is not a hero to everyone, that to some people he and his brothers "were nothing more that glorified war profiteers." He describes a herd of cameramen jostling for position, crowding in on a wounded Vietnamese soldier, photographing him in his agony, and "we looked at him and then at each other and then at the wounded Vietnamese again."

Sadly enough, Herr quickly dispatches these inchoate moral perceptions of the corruption at the heart of his band of "colleagues," the Vietnam press corps. Instead he gives us a collection of anecdotes, vignettes and epigrams, held together only by that most pathetic of 1960's slogans: "Don't trust anyone over 30."

A philosophical reader might take *Dispatches* as Exhibit A in why-we-lost-the-war. Individualism is so fragile, so liable to degenerate into self-indulgence. Alexis de Tocqueville—one almost adds, "the ever useful" de Tocqueville—put it best. "Not only does democracy make each man forget his ancestors, it hides his descendants from him, and divides him from his contemporaries; it continually turns him back into himself, and threatens, at last, to enclose him in the solitude of his own heart."

Herr not only forgets his ancestors, he thoughtlessly rejects his elders. Descendants are not mentioned. Contemporaries fade away. *Dispatches* is ultimately a nihilistic book, the celebration of the excitement of war predictable from the first sentence of the book. *Dispatches* is a book without memory and without hope because its protagonist lives so completely in the present. And finally, even the present does not suffice. The alcohol, the "pot," the loud electronic music—Herr's sacraments—are instruments not so much of grace as of stupefaction. And the rest is Silence. □

Other Views

"There is no better writing about war anywhere."

—Commonweal

". . . now there is a book that seems to be making all the right sort of incoming noises that indicate a direct hit: Michael Herr's 'Dispatches.' Quite simply, 'Dispatches' is the best book to have been written about the Vietnam War."

—New York Times Book Review

"It is not that he makes no judgments, but that he renders the welter of the concentrated madness so close up that the relevance of the judgments is clear for a moment, then obscure; *that* is the message Herr's memory finally yielded him."

—New York Review of Books

"Michael Herr has elevated reporting to a level of art reached by no other modern war correspondent—no, not even Hemingway."

—Newsday

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A Very Special Every Man

William Sloane Coffin, Jr.: *Once to Every Man: A Memoir;* Atheneum; New York, 1977.

by Duncan Williams

To anyone who lived and taught in the United States as I did during the trauma of the sixties and early seventies, William Coffin's book, *Once to Every Man,* resembles a looking-glass reflecting the anxieties, horrors and waking nightmares which characterised that epoch, the scars of which are still tender and easily re-opened. For here they all are again—the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the "freedom rides" through Alabama, the anti-war movement, the burning and looting of Watts and other cities, the Moratorium, Hanoi and the perplexing question of amnesty to deserters and draft-dodgers, culminating in the dramatic appearance of Bobby Seale and his Black Panther adherents in the unlikely setting of Battell Chapel, Yale.

Throughout his involvement with these events Coffin reveals some striking paradoxes in his character. Recounting his service with the allied forces at the end of the second World War and his subsequent encounters with the Red Army, he registers his liking for the Russian people, their literature and apparent spontaneity. He also was directly exposed to the darker side of Russian communism.

As part of his duties as "Russian Liaison Officer," an event occurred which he admits was "so painful that it's almost impossible for me to write about." The event in question arose from a joint agreement, made by Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt to repatriate each others' citizens at the end of the war as quickly as possible. Thus, the Western Allies at the close of hostilities found themselves in the embarrassing situation of having to repatriate some thousands of Russians who, faced with the agonizing choice between Stalin and Hitler, had deserted and joined General Vlassov in his fight against communism. It was left to Coffin, alone, to attend their last evening in a refugee camp. Three thousand voices were singing old Russian patriotic songs. Coffin, the guest of honour, and privy as to what was to take place soon, felt "physically ill."

> "Several times I turned to the commandant sitting next to me. It would have been so easy to tip him off. There was still time. The camp was minimally guarded. Once outside the men could tear up their identity cards, get other clothes. *Yet I couldn't bring myself to do it."* (Italics mine)

He proceeds to describe the consequence of his failure to act:

> "At 5:45 a.m. the next morning, the first U.S. division moved in as planned. Despite the fact that there were three G.I.'s to every returning Russian, I saw several men commit suicide. Two rammed their heads through windows, sawing their necks on the broken glass until they cut their jugular veins. Another took his leather bootstraps, tied a loop to the top of his triple-decker bunk, put his head through the noose and did a back flip over the edge which broke his neck. Others less successful were bandaged up and carried on stretchers to the boxcars into which the rest of the men had been herded. They were peering out through barred windows."

Surely, such an experience should have made a man of Coffin's intelligence and sensitivity aware of the horrors of the communist mentality, and yet he became one of the most prominent figures in the civil disobedience directed against the Vietnam war. Late in the book he recounts his dramatic visit to Hanoi to escort three U.S. pilots back to freedom. After a heart-rending account of bombed North-Vietnamese hospitals, schools and churches, he states casually that there were few military targets in the area. "Of course the North Vietnamese manufactured very few arms. Their military supplies came from outside the country; *Soviet* tanks, heavily laden, were moving along the shell-pocked roads." (Italics mine) It appears that by this stage he is so caught up in "the protest movement" that his indignation is highly selective, if not myopic.

It is perhaps worth remembering the infinite gullibility of such British visitors as Sidney and Beatrice Webb to the Soviet Union, prior to the second World War, and the paeans of braying praise which they heaped upon the regime. Along the same lines, it was patrician and intellectual London which fawned on Ribbentrop and jostled for his presence at their salons and dinner-parties. Meanwhile the intelligentsia of Oxford, epitomised by All Souls College, was well-nigh united against Churchill and all for "appeasement" with Hitler.

Coffin sub-titles his book, "A Memoir" and sometimes he comes close to making it an apostasy. Two quotations will suffice: "In retrospect . . . I can see that business, baseball, basketball and football have integrated this country more than all the sermons ever preached." The second is his reaction at the *actual* realities of the confrontation in Washington between Weathermen and police during a peace rally involving speakers (McGovern, Goodell, who were both booed, Coretta King "whose name and regal presence gained her a respectful silence but not undivided attention") folksingers and rock groups:

> "I had to admit that the peace movement was no longer peaceful . . . Frustrated in a

Prof. Williams is an English scholar, educated at Oxford, and author of books, of which Trousered Apes, *published in this country in 1972, is the best known.*

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way that was understandable if not excusable they (the younger veterans of the "movement") were taking on the worst features of the very people we were opposing."

It would be grossly unfair and misleading to dismiss this book as a mish-mash of hypocrisy and sentimentality. There are in it passages and chapters of interest, honesty, wit and insight. Most revealing is his chapter, "On a More Intimate Note," in which honestly and courageously he faces the agony of his first divorce from his wife Eva, daughter of Arthur Rubinstein. Here we feel the real private man emerges, shorn of his role-playing and the divided self at last coalesces in self-recognition. Having admitted to the fault, common to many of us, of possessing the "courage" to be (according to our lights), fearless in confronting the "wrongs" we see in our nation and in the world, he admits to being powerless to muster another kind of courage, that of coping with difficulties at home: "Of what was I afraid? Of failure itself. I had never been taught to deal with failure." Then comes the ultimate and stunning revelation: "I never got mad at Eva; I saved my wrath for the 'great issues'—segregation, the insanity of the arms race, the stupidity of the war, Kingman Brewster." Many have known the hell that comes from devoting their energies and talents to the realm of global abstractions while shying away from the more intimate and ultimately the most important business of all—the grappling with the small, "insignificant" problems of living with, and loving totally, one other single human being. It is so much easier to love (or hate) humanity in the abstract, which is perhaps why so many men and women of undoubted passionate public zeal lead such disastrous private lives. "To cultivate one's own garden," may seem, superficially, a selfish ethic, but if universally neglected, the weeds and tares from one's own garden and everyone else's would quickly contaminate and exterminate all horticulture and agriculture.

Believing, as I do, that civilization is a fragile, and of necessity, self-imposed veneer, preventing us individually and collectively from lapsing into barbarism, then with the wisdom and understanding of hindsight, one realizes that a commitment to law and order is not simply a *bourgeois,* squeamish defense of the *status quo* but our sole defense against anarchy, historically the inevitable precursor of some dictatorial tyranny. Coffin *used* the very laws which protected him and his ilk to subvert the Law and although his courage in action is indisputable, his motives are more suspect than perhaps he consciously realizes. The opinion given to him by a friend that he should have gone into politics and not religion is revealing, as were the words of Kingman Brewster, the long-suffering President of Yale, when he publicly remarked, more one feels in sorrow than in anger:

> "The chaplain's (Coffin's) efforts to devise 'confrontations' and 'sanctuaries' in order to gain spot news coverage seems to me to be unworthy of the true trial of conscience which touches most of your sons and preoccupies so many . . . This is especially distasteful when those who urge the resistance are too old to be able to share fully the personal and moral consequences of refusing to serve."

Although Coffin angrily rebuts this, insisting that he and his cohorts tried to share the consequence, yet buttressed by his rich and influential friends, bail is always forthcoming, legal advice tendered ("One of the great luxuries of life at Yale was to be surrounded by people who knew so much about so many different things"), Arthur Goldberg's fees are met by various subscriptions and finally the Justice Department, after Goldberg's unsuccessful appeal, quietly and, probably wisely, drops the case.

I believe, however, that my true objections to the anti-war movement although grounded in philosophical and historical reasons were reinforced by an indefinable revulsion against the whole "show biz" aura that increasingly came to surround it and gave it all an atmosphere of inappropriate and indecorous carnival. Nowhere is this better displayed than in the unlikely juxtaposition of such figures as Coffin, Dr. Spock, Jane Fonda, Norman Mailer, various rock-groups, Robert Lowell, and a myriad others. Mitchell Goodman, the writer, rang up Coffin who realized that after signing the statement ("The Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority") the signatories would be "itching for something concrete to do" and tells him that he has enlisted, for a march to the Justice Department to turn in all the draft cards, "five hundred writers, artists, professors and clergy—the kind of people," he adds revealingly "who don't mind going to jail provided you can give them endless assurance that they'll get there in dignified fashion." He then adds, and it would be comic were it not rooted in serious, historical events: "I've never seen such *individualists."*

It is this combination of moral rectitude and arrogance which haunts me. How would these "individualists" have felt had the Secretary of State, the Pentagon generals, or for that matter the four successive Presidents of the United States

Other Views

". . . because so much of Coffin's life has been of a public nature, the telling of his own story becomes a lively and useful commentary on society, religion and education."
—Higher Education News Notes

"It is the tale of one of our great dissenters, dealing not only with social injustices but also with those inner imperatives that propel one forward into a revision of priorities, into a shifting sense of self, into growth."
—Psychology Today

" 'Once to Every Man' is a perceptive and revelatory political history of America since World War II, for the twists and turns are mirrored in Coffin's life. And as such, the reflection helps make sense of the reality."
—New York Times Book Review

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(who were clearly privy to highly classified information and all of whom either instigated or supported the U.S. involvement in Vietnam) dictated to them what they should teach, preach, paint and compose? Once again, civilization has at its root a sense of order, of decorum and an awareness of the demarcations and limitations of institutions and the individuals who both serve, and are protected by, such institutions.

Coffin, after a patrician upbringing in a New York penthouse-apartment and a summer home on Long Island (complete with Swiss governess, chauffeur for the Lincoln, etc.) spent some time, after prep-school (which he found "too orderly") in Paris and Geneva. He dropped his dream of being a musical conductor for that of a concert pianist and actually gave a private performance for Cortot and met Paderewski. Yale Divinity School appears to have persuaded him that the Church was his true vocation but in reality he never left the stage. His childhood dreams of conductor/concert-pianist while revealing, omit the compulsive histrionic facet of his personality. It is as an actor and manipulator (and this is not intended wholly pejoratively) that his true talents are displayed until he eventually comes to believe that he is the only true conscience of the nation.

Nowhere is this fusion of spiritual pride *(hybris),* gullibility and trendiness more directly revealed than in his much-publicized and much-photographed visit to the Justice Building. Only four people were allowed to enter, among them one Dickie Harris, "a real eye-catcher. He was black, tall and skinny, clad in a white T-shirt covered with buttons, each with a date commemorating some event or the founding of some movement, one for almost every day of the year. He had a bushy Afro . . . and I wasn't the least surprised to find he came from Berkeley." The four met with John McDonough, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, whom they asked if the Department intended to investigate the alleged war crimes in Vietnam. Then:

> "Very slowly, his (Dickie's) roving eyes carefully avoiding Mr. McDonough, he asked quietly, 'Man, are you going to hear me.' Mr. McDonough looked *puzzled.* 'Yes, Mr. Harris. I'm listening.' Instantly Dickie *slammed* his hand down on the table. Staring straight at McDonough he *shouted,* 'I didn't say listen, I said *hear me,* man' . . . Slowly (Dickie) leaned forward, all the while looking intently into McDonough's eyes. Then once again very quietly—until he reached the *last* syllable of the *last* word which came out like *cannon shot*—he said, 'Man . . . you . . . don't . . . *exist.* We're going to ignore you, man, you're nothin'.' His scorn was *magnificent* but after five minutes I interrupted him. I think Mr. McDonough's heard you by now, Dickie. So let's ask him if he has anything he wants to say to us.' McDonough shot me a *grateful* glance. 'As a matter of fact,' he said. 'I do have something that I would like to say.' Reaching inside his coat he pulled out a typed statement. Clearing his throat he was about to read it when with a great *show* of offended credulity Dickie *leaped* to his feet. 'Man,' he said. 'You ain't gonna read that?' 'That was my intention, Mr. Harris.' 'Well I *ain't gonna listen.* See you cats later.' With that he *swung* himself out of the room, his hands on his hips, every movement *grace itself.*"

What must be apparent is that the thinker, the theologian Coffin is seemingly unaware that "the sleep of reason, breeds monsters," and he is mesmerized by the drama and apparent virility of this buffoon. The latter in his arrogant and ignorant self-sufficiency represents "grace itself" while the good-mannered courteousness of McDonough is pilloried. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to imagine a fairer and juster society being founded by adherents and admirers of the puerile posturings of the "Dickies" of this world. "Dickie" in his refusal to recognize McDonough's existence and his blind refusal to hear any evidence which may challenge *his* preconceived opinions epitomizes precisely the blinkered attitudes which Coffin finds so distasteful and abhorrent in those he opposes.

We leave Coffin, his second marriage in ruins, a more pensive and less arrogant man. "Men never do evil so cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction," wrote Pascal. Certainly no one who reads this compulsively absorbing and haunting book could accuse Coffin of "evil." One merely hopes that in his current position as senior minister at the Riverside Church in New York he has, belatedly grasped the truth of the old pietist phrase, which he himself quotes, "to let go and let God." □

In the forthcoming issue of the *Chronicles of Culture:*

That's Entertainment

"If dime books and Elinor Glyn were the leisure fiction of the '10s, Edgar Wallace of the '20s, Vicky Baum of the '30s, Raymond Chandler of the '40s—we now have entered the post-Mickey Spillane era. Jacqueline Susann and Harold Robbins are its conditioners of minds and consciences. They and their imitators have turned the gist of entertainment literature from sensationalism and luridness to depravity. Their programmatic cynicism is so extreme that they arouse the suspicion that they are preordained by some ideological forces."

from *Comment*

Also:
Commendables — In Focus — Waste of Money — The American Scene — Journalism — Polemics & Exchanges.

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Demolishing Taboos

Maurice Clavel: ***Ce que je crois;*** **André Glucksmann:** ***Les maîtres—penseurs;*** **Bernard-Henri Lévy:** ***La barbarie a visage humain.***

by Thomas Molnar

As everybody knows by now, the *nouveaux philosophes* in Paris may be *the* factor blocking communist/socialist victory at the polls, come March. Their case is the latest in the series of intellectual conversions away from Marxism to . . . one-does-not-quite-yet-know-what, but at any rate a more decent form of thinking. At first, to Americans at least, it may seem incongruous and disproportionate to claim that a few theoretical writings by mostly young professors could be an obstacle to a political victory by the Left. But literature, philosophy and politics are so intertwined in France that a) intellectual products may indeed set the tone in national affairs, and b) after the public acclaim that these books received, the moderate leftists may not want to lose respectability by voting with known agents of the gulag.

This penetration of "metapolitics" into practical politics is perhaps a bad thing per se, and among other things it contradicts the sacred cows both of democracy and pragmatism; but the event—the publication of a few books by self-critical and repentant leftists—is at least able to stir the intellectual community from its icebound marxo-utopian convictions, something we have not witnessed on the American scene since the days of Louis Budenz and Whittaker Chambers. Even then, the phenomenon was isolated and the culprits were duly excluded from the ranks of "decent" and "thinking" men.

* *

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What happened a few years ago to Solzhenitsyn is now happening to the *nouveaux philosophes:* assimilation and digestion by Publicity. There is hardly a literary critic, book reviewer, aspiring marxist student, big or small magazine, that has not provided a didactic analysis of "Paris's latest craze;" after the long dominance of existentialism, structuralism, euro-communism, it is the "new philosophy" that is making the graduate students' mouths water. Here is, by the grace of the Left Bank, a new and infinitely flexible dissertation topic for the next few years. (Dissertation writers must shudder at the thought that once upon a time—for thirty long years!—only one style of writing and style of thought, classicism, prevailed in France between 1660 and 1690.)

Let me try briefly to rid the *nouveaux philosophes* of some clichés that inevitably accumulate on their fresh celebrity—and of some misplaced aura too. Most of them were Maoist in 1968, their schoolmates now say they were the craziest of the radical bunch. Then they made two encounters, both, although unequally, decisive. The first was Maurice Clavel, now classified as a mentor of the group, older than they, also a professor of philosophy and the number one television attraction on France's numerous PBS channels. The second was Solzhenitsyn.

Clavel attracted them as the man who demonstrated the joint and interdependent bankruptcy of humanism, academic rationalism, and religion without God. He has also argued that the significance of 1968 was not the revolt against the consumer society, but against the liberal, enlightened cul-de-sac into which for decades have marched atheists and bishops, conservatives and socialists, leaders of industry and of marxist parties. As for Solzhenitsyn, his impact was nothing less than stunning; Bernard-Henri Lévy calls him the "Shakespeare of our time" who shows us monsters and compels us to look them in the face. In a similar vein, André Glucksmann writes that the Gulag is "Macbeth plus ideology." They compare Solzhenitsyn also to Dante, topographer of hell. Without Solzhenitsyn to back up his figures, could Clavel credibly write that in a "good" year the Inquisition produced 120 dead over against the Gulag's three million in thirty years?

Under Solzhenitsyn's and Clavel's combined influence the young philosophers were able to break through the barrier of taboos and the *mythe de la gauche.* They began tearing at the roots of the Gulag, then Lenin, then Marx, but only to indict the "master thinkers" in general, from Descartes to the Sorbonne big wigs. Clavel speaks of the University's holy trinity: Marx, Freud, Nietzsche. Glucksmann's verdict is more sweeping, he focuses not on 1968 but on an earlier date, 1789, and finds the monstrous sisterhood of *History,* on the side of the Rhine (France) and of *Philosophy,* on the German side. Robespierre, Marat, St. Just, Couthon acting out the dreams of Fichte, Hegel, Kant. (One is reminded of Heine reassuring his French friends: "We in Germany are smarter than you, we enlisted God in the battle for atheism.")

Clavel had an easy time coining striking formulas: What has the culture of the last two centuries been if not an anti-God coalition—while Lévy spoke of "Karl Kapital" and of "Marx-la-Terreur," a kind of underworld thug. Universal blasphemy! Formulas that kill more effectively than even ridicule! Clavel nevertheless warns: If we allow the marxist doctrine to survive with the reputation of a critical instrument par excellence, in no time Marx will again be venerated as the liberator—this time from the chains of the Gulag!

* *

These few fragments from the leading *nouveaux philosophes* enable us to

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put "Paris's last ism" into focus. There are discouraging as well as hopeful results. Let us distinguish three.

1) The new philosophers are incisive thinkers, sharp stylists, inventors of hard hitting phrases. At times, in a flash, they plunge down to the Mindanao deep of wisdom and surface with a pearl. But the pearl may be surrounded with barnacles and debris. For example: in spite of their encounter with Solzhenitsyn, they have mistakenly distilled from the events of 1968 and from the Gulag story a fear of the State, a near-anarchistic, libertarian allergy to power and authority. They write that 1968 was a rebellion against the State's omnipotence, and that the Gulag is prefigured in imperial Rome, in the papacy, in the reign of Louis XIV. This is, of course, nonsense, and shows how even good minds are buffeted between left-utopia and right-utopia, with human nature and the nature of politics ignored. Glucksmann, like Robert Nozick in this country, rises against the State because *some* States, expropriated by a political party or by a barbarous chieftain, behave abnormally. (Nozick even wonders if those who favor a strong State are not sick with fear of independent thought—the usual "father-figure" notion of authority. Glucksmann, Nozick, Lévy used to be leftists; is there such a thing as an over-reaction here?)

2) Lévy's conclusion is the pessimism of the Stoics, almost exactly modeled on that of Camus. ". . . The king has no use for the sage . . . the masses remain indifferent to the light of reason, and Reason's rule is a long abuse of the masses . . . All we have left against the barbarians' advance are the weapons of language and some lonely shelters. Let's bear witness to the unspeakable and let's delay the coming of horrors . . . We will not remake the world, but let's watch that it does not disintegrate." Lost illusions after the lights of 1968 went out . . .

Yet, it is also Lévy, in the wake of Dostoyevski, Malraux, yes, of Camus too, and now Clavel, who sees life in the shadow of the Gulag as the consequence of society's loss of its ultimate "referent." Not that "God is dead," which is where the Enlightenment came in; Lévy merely notes that the world has seen already nations without art and literature, and societies without history. There has never been a community of men that could exist without being "pegged on the divine." And the twilight of the gods is a prelude to that of man.

Clavel goes much farther. His return to faith, chronicled in a tumultuous best-seller, *Ce que je crois,* was that of a typical intellectual who burns the idols he previously adored. Now he misses no opportunity to castigate the Church for her post-Vatican II false worldliness, her crowding on the socialist-humanist band-wagon. Clavel is then not a neo-Stoic, a position which seems to be the horizon of so many ex-leftists "choosing freedom:" he sees the cleavage, either God or Nothingness, tertium non datur. And God means for Clavel the Church with every one of her dogmas, doctrines, and practices. Like Maurice Barres some seventy years ago, Clavel answers when queried what he believes: "Go and ask Rome!" The intriguing questions now in Paris is whether Glucksmann and Lévy, Jews, will see the logic of their itinerary in conversion. After all, intellectuals often reach that port through arguments, with grace superadded at one of the later stages. But this is another story.

3) What the *nouveaux philosophes* now discover has been written down long before their books came to stun the notables of Left-Bank orthodoxy. That the Enlightenment, with its German and French components, that the liberalism of the nineteenth century, that twentieth-century socialism have the same roots—has been so amply explained and demonstrated that the new philosophers, repeating the obvious, may too be soon forgotten. If their fame survives for a while, the reason will be the timing: as if they were agents of a right-wing conspiracy (this is actually intimated in a furious booklet by Aubral and Delcourt, two authors of the left), the *nouveaux philosophes* arrived in time to shatter at least the theoretical respectability of the Mitterrand-Marchais deal. But there was of course more. Lévy could write that in the nice, snuggy world of the liberal-socialist-communist continuum the Nazi camps appeared as a monstrous exception, an atavistic throwback to the Neanderthal; but are the camps in Russia a Russian or a Marxist product? The Nazis were just one of the crowd, the totalitarian "exceptions" are obviously outcrowding the humanist-socialist "rule." In other words, not Stalinism, but Marxism is the evil, the last black fruit of a poisonous tree with roots in the Renaissance. From our point of view it is regrettable that with the marxist-totalitarian aberration the principle of a strong and purposeful State is thrown out too. As said before, this is the libertarian component in the awakening mind of shocked ex-leftists. The balance may be later restored.

Restored, particularly, since Solzhenitsyn will hardly be forgotten. The Paris intelligentsia, ever since Pierre Abelard, entertains the cult of brilliant and eloquent minds, and a foreign guest, not speaking French, is not as a rule noticed. If Solzhenitsyn was, it is because seeing him people exclaim in the depth of their soul: *Ecce Homo!* The crucified gulag inmate who fought back; who won the battle against the KGB; in whom the martyrs live on. What learned treatises and political arguments century-long could not achieve, namely to unmask Marx and with him the horrors of all utopia, the man dropped from the sky by a KGB plane, a miraculous appearance, accomplished. The good news of the soul's triumph was again announced, the rest of the work belongs to the disciples.

The real significance of the new philosophers' *oeuvre* is that the soul and mind of men remain redeemable.

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The question could now be this: will the works of the *nouveaux philosophes* be translated and published in these United States, so proud of catching the latest wave in the Paris art-novel-

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and-film-world, so eager to secure the widest publicity to leftist manifestations—although much less alert to recognize the richest literature of the day, the Russian and Iron Curtain novels. True, unlike in Italy and France, communists, socialists and moderate center are not locked in deadly conflict on these shores. We enjoy (?) a lukewarm leftism which does not spell out its identity, but is nevertheless more paralyzing for the nation's mind than the vigorous controversies opposing communists and various shades of anti-communists (*horribile dictu,* even rightists and self-confessed reactionaries!) in France. Just to remain with the new philosophers: could we imagine among America's young intelligentsia, so deficient in imagination, an André Glucksmann who raised his voice in 1975 against Alvaro Cunhal the "Stalinist bastard" (*crapule stalinienne*) in Portugal, turned publicly against the "red bourgeoisie" in France, finally against Mao when the monster kicked the dust? Could we imagine an André Glucksmann in America saying and writing these things—then being published and becoming a counter-revolutionary spokesman on television?

True again, we do not have communists here of Georges Marchais' stripe commanding a Stalinist party with a half-a-million militant thugs. But does our one-sided knowledge industry (university, media, publishers of textbooks, foundations) not possess a surer monopoly of mind-manipulation than the French salesmen of the gulag-regime? The translation of the *nouveaux philosophes'* works may be a test case. □

Intelligent Men Under Self-Hypnosis

Daniel Schorr: *Clearing the Air;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston, 1977.

by Edward J. Walsh

Daniel Schorr would probably be the first to concede that his youthful fascination with the news business as the impassive, coldly objective reporting of events was incredibly naive. No reporter can detach himself totally from his surroundings, as Emile Zola proved in the last century. If he could, his dispatches would be unreadable. It's fair to say that Schorr's book is readable, with reservations. His intent in *Clearing the Air* is to defend his causing to be published in the pseudo-underground newspaper *Village Voice* the secret report of the House Intelligence Committee on the Central Intelligence Agency, in February, 1976, and to describe the events which preceded and followed his action.

But *Clearing the Air* does not justify its title. To be sure, the author spills a lot of intimate details about his professional life; about CBS News, his employer of twenty-odd years; about the links between the CIA and the news organizations. Bits and pieces of this make mildly titillating reading, as do the "human interest" stories in the Sunday papers, but most of it is banal, and unimportant to Schorr's purpose. Why he feels compelled to devote nearly one-third of the book to the tediously overreported details of Watergate is a mystery: he was there, we know; every Washington reporter was.

But the reference to Watergate, though tiresome, does have a point, from Schorr's perspective. He sees himself as a maverick, a God-honest direct and relentless reporter in a show-biz profession. And CBS's Watergate coverage ended on a soft note, he believes, when fellow commentators Dan Rather and Eric Sevareid, responding to direction from corporate higher-ups, went easy on Nixon, with a "bring us together" theme, rather than probing the defeated president's last-minute maneuvers to slip out of Washington with his evil deeds only partly uncovered. Schorr's hard-line recommendations were ignored, and Sevareid still won't speak to him. He felt shunted aside without a sensational story; Nixon's resignation stole this thunder. He longed for controversy: it arrived, in the form of revelations about abuses by the CIA.

In considering Schorr's cataloguing of misdeeds by the CIA, it must be freely declared that some of them were pernicious, and even heinous: the experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs on unsuspecting employees; the assassination attempts on foreign leaders; the domestic political dirtywork. Some were plain stupid—for example, the project designed to convince the Cuban people that the rebirth of Christ was imminent, and that Castro was the Devil Incarnate. More seriously, the Agency bungled in assessing Soviet expenditures on weapons, and on the likelihood of war in the Mideast in 1973.

But Schorr's book is not an attempt to reflect thoughtfully on the dangers of real CIA excesses, or to consider means of curbing them in the future. He is a polemicist operating out of Washington, one of a crowd; his book panders selective clichés, such as "the public's right to know," while instinctively disparaging others, for example, "national security." His thinking is a consummate blurring of distinctions. He asserts, in a speech that "Americans were leaning towards disclosure," and later, that "[the Ethics Committee's] subpoena produced a surge of sentiment for an unfettered press"—personified, to Schorr, by those who testified in his behalf: Dan Rather, of CBS; Mary McGrory of the *Washington Star;* Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post;* I.F. Stone, radical government-hater of yore; and Seymour Hersh of the *New York Times.*

There is no evidence, other than the assertions of Schorr and his colleagues,

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that the American people supported the emasculation of the CIA conducted by Senator Church before the TV cameras. On the contrary, repeated polls have shown support for a strong national defense, which presumably includes an effective intelligence capability, which further presumes the need for a measure of secrecy. As far as the "surge of sentiment" was concerned, the journalists who appeared at Schorr's hearing were members of the same club, who think and write, as William F. Buckley remarked, like the Rockettes.

The investigation of the CIA was a charade conducted by scoundrels with media exposure foremost on their minds; the House Intelligence Committee, chaired by Rep. Otis Pike, competed with the Senate in leaking juicy secrets to the press, keeping the CIA on page one for months, and the cameras in the hearing rooms.

In this sense, Schorr can't be blamed for his perspective as a newsman. He was reporting trivia as well as hard news, and he knew it. The House Committee did not mind his reading their report and discussing it on the air; before it appeared unexpectedly on the front page of the *Village Voice,* the substance of the Committee's findings had already been extensively reported. For this it was not the press which deserved blame, but Congress.

Still, one is forced to grapple with the dilemma Schorr happened upon when he obtained a copy of the Pike Committee report from a secret source. He reacted with confusion, as did his superiors at CBS, who refused even to answer his plea: What to do? The publication of the report was a minor flicker in terms of the authentic problem faced by Schorr, and faced today by American society: the power of the news media, specifically television news; more specifically the medium of television itself to influence and manipulate the thinking and behavior, that is, the *culture* of vast numbers of people.

In this context, the endless pages on Watergate, the anecdotal tidbits about the top echelons of power at CBS, even the inner details of CIA activities become secondary. To focus on the dilemma of culture that Daniel Schorr inadvertently raised is to focus on the thinking of Schorr himself. His book is a picture-perfect case study of the development of a bewildered mind, and then, marvelously, a tentative foray into intellectual clarity.

Throughout his career, and especially following his release of the House report, Schorr was accused of being an arrogant man. I find him guilty of only a rather petty vanity—his book is filled with asides on French restaurants, weeks at Aspen, dinners and lunches with the prestigious and the powerful. His career and attitudes developed along predictable lines in the world of modern journalism. He began reporting as a chronicler of news; the objective observer, as we learn it. His aggressiveness sometimes got him into trouble with the power brokers of the moment: corporate executives as well as politicians; Bill Paley as well as Barry Goldwater. In a newsman, irritating powerful people can lead to self-righteousness, as it did with Schorr. Admiration from colleagues, which Schorr always had, can be reflected in creeping bias in reporting the news. When the CIA story broke, Schorr was irretrievably immersed in the issue, heart as well as mind. Inevitably, he *became* an issue.

The issue, as he saw it, was the public's right to know the story of abuses by the CIA at home and abroad. "I perceived . . . an obligation to resist the suppression of information . . .," he explains. Instinctively, it seems, the newsman rushes to the defense of the First Amendment by releasing classified information. The fact that the already thorough airing of CIA misbehavior had not caused an uproar among the American people is irrelevant to Schorr.

The true issue of Schorr's odyssey was not the criminality of releasing a classified document, a document, which, when published, contained little that was news. Neither was it the hypocrisy of Congress, indignant at leaks it encouraged and purveyed. Rather, the issue is the power of the modern press, and the frightening vulnerability of intelligent men to self-hypnosis. For Schorr is an intelligent man. But he is drawn, gradually, and perhaps irresistibly into the web of illusion that permeates modern journalism: that the First Amendment justifies any behavior, any perspective, no matter how obtrusive or offensive, that is useful in ferreting out "the news." And it is Schorr's recognition of this illusion, finally, that hints at his intellectual salvation.

Increasingly, toward the end of his story, and explosively, in his final chapter, Schorr focuses on the preoccupation with trivia and nonsense of so much of the press. As he was pestered by reporters in the same way he pestered others, he remarks: "I found myself echoing the sentiments of many critics of the press—in the feeling that the mass media were on a different wavelength from grassroots people. During that period, I fell out of love with the press, and into love with the People."

It is a telling observation. In "The National Seance," Schorr tells of a young boy who is ordered by a robber to watch television. The child stares at the tube

Other Preferences

"Schorr's detailed confessional has been well worth waiting for."
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Exactly what you would expect; it is clear, interesting, carefully documented, unpretentious and merciless in its contempt for executive invasion, cowardice and smuggery, whether in the United States government or the executive reaches of the Columbia Broadcasting System."
—John Kenneth Galbraith

"The book, while certainly slanted toward a Schorr's-eye view of his own tumultuous career, is one of the most candid and responsible volumes ever written about TV news."
—*Chicago Tribune*

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for hours, ignoring his mother's cries. He described the sophisticated appeals to TV of politicians, special interest groups, and terrorists, who have developed the ability to count the networks among their hostages: "By giving the extremists exposure, we helped to gain them support." A nation—mesmerized by the tube—increasingly confuses fantasy with reality, until, Schorr explains, reality fades and disappears.

It is stunning and powerful, the astute criticism of a journalist who trafficked in televised news. Schorr does not renounce his credentials with the Washington press corps, or temper his obeisance to the First Amendment. He asks questions, but does not answer them—he does not "clear the air." Yet, it seems, he slips out of television journalism and looks about, briefly, his prejudices stirred and somewhat disheveled. His book is full of uneasiness, of puzzlement, and perhaps, therefore, of hope. □

A Novel as Manifesto, or *Mein Kampf* Revisited

Marilyn French: *The Women's Room;* Summit Books; New York, 1977.

by Mary Ellen Fox

Only a generation ago we fought a monumental war in order to combat the principle that a group can claim absolute, or total, superiority over another group and impose its domination by force through this claim. Although any sort of chauvinism, and group and class conflicts, are deplorable facts of life, the Western democratic civilization is built on the premise that compromises are always possible. It was impossible, however, to compromise with the totalitarian worldview of Nazism, which had to be irrevocably defeated through war at the cost of immense human suffering.

Unfortunately, in the last decade, there appears to be a frightening echo of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* surfacing within the women's movement. Now we have a novel which confirms the worst fears. French, its author, is a proponent of feminism evolved into totalitarianism. If there is no emphatic rebuttal of this aspect of the movement, the rest of the society will have no choice but to consider the attitudes codified by this novel not those of a mere radical fringe, but as the very essence of feminist ideology. This ideology can be defined as sheer hatred of one half the world's population. So virulent is Marilyn French in her denunciation of men that it seems comparable only to Hitler's paranoid ravings against the Jews. There is no man innocent of crimes against women; simply by being born male he participates in the collective responsibility and guilt for all of women's woes. And, according to French, they are devastating.

Dr. Fox, Yale '74, specialized in feminine characters and destinies in the XIX century novel.

As in every ideological manifesto, the roles and functions in the basic morality play have to be clear-cut. Never, except in some nineteenth century melodrama, has poor Woman, quivering and helpless like a threatened widow or orphan, been so vulnerable to the sinister advances of a mustachioed villain. Every time a man appears, we are supposed to know he is up to no good, and filled with righteous indignation, we are expected to hiss at appropriate intervals. However, just like the skeptical Thelma Ritter character, in the movie *All About Eve,* who sarcastically remarked about the tearjerking tale of young Eve, I too can see "the bloodhounds baying and salivating and snapping at our poor heroine's heels."

We first encounter Mira, French's moral and existential emblem, hiding in the ladies' room at Harvard in the late sixties. However, since "lady" is presumably considered a four letter word by those in the femlib movement, the sign on the door has been graffitied over to read "women's room." Anyway, Mira is hiding in the toilet, having one of her nervous breakdowns.

Mira was born with enormous disadvantages: she is a woman in a society made by and for men; as a child she was taught not to cross her legs at the knee; and she is a pretty girl, which makes her the object of male importunate attention and thus the perennial victim.

As such, Mira married Norm, a medical student and male chauvinist. Her downfall has begun. To destroy a woman, according to French: "You don't have to rape or kill her; you don't even have to beat her. You can just marry her." Norm's ineptitude deprived Mira of the pleasures of sex but not the consequences: two babies in two years, and the drudgery of diapers, dishes and dinners. It is 1959: Norm has voted for Nixon, Mira for Kennedy. He becomes a doctor and they move to a suburban split level. Here Mira makes friends with other young married women and an inchoate feeling of women's solidarity against their common oppressor takes root. For the men have now begun to mistreat their wives, unfaithfulness and even beatings follow. Children can be cruel, too, when not immersed in television. Husbands grow tired of their wives and leave them for other women. This is exactly what Norm does to Mira.

This is why Mira, the everywoman, has her nervous breakdown, attempts suicide, and hides in a facility of physiological relief, which becomes an ideological symbol and literary metaphor. She manages to pull herself together, however, puts her sons in private schools and goes off to Harvard on her alimony. She studies, she meets new people and makes friends. It is the late sixties and she becomes involved in radical politics and women's groups. She finds, for the first time, real companionship and a marriage of true minds. There are endless

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discussions in which the women perennially analyze men and their lives with men. They are angry and hostile. French writes of their common attitudes:

"By this time, all of us had a word. It was THEM, and we all meant the same thing by it: men. Each of us felt done in by one of them, but that wasn't it. Because each of us had friends, and our friends were also being done in by them. And each of our friends had friends . . ."

The women at Harvard are from diverse backgrounds and age groups. Yet they begin to love each other and are very supportive. They all agree on the inequities of men. They have had bad experiences with marriage. Several of the women become lovers and enter into lesbian "marriages;" these relationships, predictably, are peaceful and nurturing. Mira, however, is self-destructively attracted to the enemy, meets Ben and they fall in love. He is sensitive and kind, not a MCP, and they are happy. But he is an African specialist and plans on returning there; Mira refuses to give up her studies to join him. They part, and he marries his secretary, an accomplished homemaker, has two children and moves to the suburbs. Mira fights with her visiting sons, now teenagers: they only want to eat hamburgers and drink cokes, and reject the quiche and wine she offers. One of the women in the group is raped; the police and courts further abuse and humiliate her. Another woman is shot dead by police while picketing with other militant feminists. The happy little world constructed by women only crumbles. Mira finishes her dissertation and ends up teaching English in a small community college. She drinks brandy and feels that she's going mad. She has bad dreams; she feels dead. She spends hours walking on the beach watching the tide. She is alone.

Others' Taste

"This is, indeed, as all the advance publicity has claimed, a novel of great power and intelligence . . . it speaks from the heart to women everywhere . . ."
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Pretend you're from Mars, you haven't heard a word, and you want to know something about the lives of certain women in midcentury America. 'The Women's Room' is a good place to begin . . . Some shattering dramas occur in this book, but they're nearly always believable; we're willing to accept them as part of normal life . . ."
—Anne Tyler, *The New York Times Book Review*

"It will change your life if you're a woman . . . It is as if Marilyn French is holding up a mirror to her readers . . . An experience not to be missed."
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"The story of one woman, and of all women . . . a wonderful novel, full of life and passions."
—*Washington Post*

"A courageous, powerful, honest novel—one you'd like to give to 20 women (and, perhaps anonymously, to 20 men) you know."
—*Chicago Tribune*

"The best novel yet about the lives of women."
—Betty Friedan

"It pulses with life and individuality . . . a book that women are going to read to relieve the stories of their lives."
—*New York Times*

"A haunting novel, perhaps even a milestone."
—*New York Magazine*

"A landmark book! . . . The women's novel of the year, perhaps of many years."
—*John Barkham Reviews*

"Magnificent"
—*Philadelphia Inquirer*

It is not easy to summarize this novel in order to convey its all-encompassing banality and the perniciousness of its premise: men bad, women good; men victimizer, women victim; men enemy, women friend. Although French makes every attempt to compartmentalize life in ideological drawers and folders, reality is unyielding and resists this kind of molding. The result is a curious futility of efforts: French's skills as a writer, which are obvious, betray her intentions and render more color and dimension to her characters and situation than could serve her thesis. French sees the relationship between the sexes as constant warfare:

"It's as though deep, deep at the heart, the silent heart that rarely erupts, that keeps still because if it didn't the world would be destroyed . . . the sexes hate and fear each other. Women see men as oppressors, as tyrants, as an enemy with superior slaves who rattle their chains threateningly, constantly reminding the men that if they wanted to, they could poison his food; just watch out."

This, of course, is pure bunk, and the incessant reiteration of all this hatred and injustice is reminiscent of the Big Lie. If repeated often enough, powerfully enough, eventually it will become an acceptable version of reality. But we know that this vision is as commensurate with life as Goebbels' or Zhdanov's propaganda of hatred. Orwell's "Four legs good, two legs bad," in *Animal Farm,* is our civilization's exegesis of that state of mind.

"Sometimes I think that's all men are. Tin gods. They have to be or they are nothing," is the way Mira propounds her concept of half of mankind. Nevertheless, men have the power, so a wise woman has to know how to engage in power politics: "Men are only vehicles for getting things. 'If I know how to use them, good for me!' Her body was taut, her fists clenched . . . She looked noble and powerful and beaten all at once."

The most trenchant arguments against the book are in French's own words:

"What is a man, anyway? Everything I see around me in popular culture tells me

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a man is he who screws and kills. But everything I see around me in life tells me a man is he who makes money. Maybe these two are related . . ."

"I'm willing to dispense with them (*men*) forever and have children only through parthenogenesis, which would mean I'd have only female children, which would suit me fine . . ."

". . . if the men I've known haven't much indulged in killing and are no great shakes at screwing and have made money (for the most part) in only moderate amounts, they haven't been anything else either. They're just dull . . ."

". . . the women I know . . . (are) great . . . You think I hate men. I guess I do, although . . . I mistrust generalized hatred . . . my hatred is learned from experience: that is not prejudice. I wish it were prejudice. Then, perhaps, I could unlearn it."

My belief, however, is that French and women of her persuasion embrace their hatred and bigotry with fanaticism. Their views may seem stale and flat, but they are by no means unprofitable, to judge by the critical and popular acclaim which greeted the appearance of this book. These convictions are as much *à la mode* at this moment as the concept of Aryan supremacy was at another time. This too shall pass. What is most disturbing is not that this book was written, but that it found its way to the best-seller list, which proves that a large segment of the American public has a craving for Hitlerian disregard for humaneness. I only hope, however, that this holocaust of reason vanishes without leaving in its wake too many battered and confused minds. □

A Crusade in Reverse Gear

Daniel Yergin: *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston, 1977.

by Alan J. Levine

Daniel Yergin's study of the beginning of the Cold War arouses mixed emotions. Unlike so many recent writers on this subject, he does not argue extremist theories that American leaders were reactionaries guilty of unprovoked aggression, or falsify the historical record. *Shattered Peace* is well-written and informative; some of the material on the debates within the American government is often revealing.

But Yergin frequently lapses into vagueness, and he avoids analyzing some essential matters. He often seems to be trying to convey an impression rather than present a straightforward argument. His conclusion is that the Cold War was the result of unfortunate misunderstandings and mistakes by both sides (but particularly by the Americans).

This theory of "symmetrical sinfulness" is far from convincing.

A curious feature of *Shattered Peace* is that the central theme often seems to be the clash between two supposed sets of prescriptions for dealing with the Soviets, rather than the conflict between the Soviets and the West. Yergin dubs these the "Riga" and "Yalta axioms." The "Riga" school, led by the State Department's Russian specialists, held that the Soviets were basically aggressive, their actions determined in the last analysis by Communist ideology. Yergin attributes these ideas to the influence of White Russian emigres on American diplomats in the listening post at Riga before 1933, though these ideas have been propounded by academics, ex-Communists, Russian Mensheviks and others who take the Communists seriously. Yergin admits that there is some truth in these views, and that the American diplomats were right to recognize the evils of the "Stalinist System." But he rejects their conclusion that totalitarianism at home meant an aggressive foreign policy. He never offers any reason for this strange disjunction; and very good reasons indeed are needed for believing that one of the two most vicious tyrannies in history melted into moderation beyond its borders.

Yergin prefers the "Yalta axioms": these held that the Soviet Union was a traditional great power acting within, rather than against, the international system. Its behavior, and aims, while not nice, posed no threat to America, and tension could be resolved by a deal recognizing a Soviet sphere of influence. Yergin presents President Roosevelt as the chief exponent of these ideas, supposedly vindicated by détente. He interprets Roosevelt's whole design for the preservation of peace by the great powers as implying the acceptance of Soviet control in Eastern Europe, and claims that this acceptance was registered in the Yalta agreements. But the Truman administration "gripped by messianic liberalism" opposed Soviet actions, breaking with Roosevelt's policy.

This interpretation is hard to square with the facts. Yergin obscures the fact that Roosevelt's scheme for the "Four Policemen" depended precisely on the great powers refraining from expansion, without which it would be a protection racket. Roosevelt did not accept a Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe as a necessary evil; he differed from the "Riga school" only in that he hoped that it would not occur. There were no "Yalta axioms" based on a considered evaluation; only illusions, which Stalin dispelled before Roosevelt's death. The record of the Yalta conference and agreements, and Roosevelt's subsequent protests against Soviet actions (which Yergin ignores) show quite clearly that Stalin was not conceded a free hand in Eastern Europe. Except

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for George Kennan, the "Riga school" did not oppose the Yalta agreements or other attempts to come to terms with the Soviets; they merely doubted that they would work. Yergin's use of the vague term "sphere of influence," admittedly a widespread fault among diplomatic historians, incidentally obscures the fact that even strongly anti-Soviet officials did not oppose Soviet exercise of a loose hegemony comparable to that the United States then commanded in the Americas. Nearly all objected to the imposition of puppet governments in Eastern Europe, though American opposition amounted to little more than the dispatch of protest notes.

No clear account of that crucial process can be found in Yergin's book, and he defines it, without producing evidence, as a move defensive in motivation. Stalin's aim was to create a "glacis"—it is not clear against whom; and with a flick of the pen the conquest of half of Europe becomes the expression of a policy of "conservatism." The Truman administration, however, overreacted to Stalin's actions, and took up a "global, often crusading policy." This must be the only crusade in history to operate in reverse gear. Yet Yergin admits that Secretary of State Byrnes was a "relentless negotiator" whose whole career was dedicated to compromise. He notes Byrnes' attempt to assuage Soviet fears of Germany and Japan, with long-term demilitarization treaties, but fails to explain the strange Soviet disinterest in them.

Probably the most salient characterizations of Yergin's book are his consistent minimizing of Stalin's aims and forced insistence on equating Western and Soviet actions that were not comparable. Soviet aims in the Middle East are portrayed as revision of the Straits convention and obtaining an oil concession in Iran. The demands for bases and territorial cessions in Turkey and the attempted sovietization of northern Iran are barely referred to, though it was those actions that worried the Western powers. Soviet policy in Iran is thus equated to that of the West, which also sought oil, but unlike the Soviets carried out agreements on troop withdrawals. Yergin's account of the dispute over the control of atomic energy is somewhat similar. American insistence that the Soviets permit an inspection system to operate freely before they disarmed is equated with the Soviet position that all atomic weapons must be destroyed and that no inspection could be allowed.

Yergin finds that "it seems unlikely" that Stalin aimed at gaining control of Western Europe; he describes the Soviet aim as the division of Europe into spheres. But the Western European Communist parties consistently spoke of achieving "People's Democracies" in Western as well as Eastern Europe, while the Yugoslavs were told in 1946 that "all of Germany will be ours." Even Yergin admits that the Berlin blockade was aimed at preventing the consolidation of West Germany.

Yergin sees the problem of German reparations as "crucial," and seems to attribute the partition of Germany to failure to agree on that matter. The Soviets certainly regarded extracting reparations as very important. There is however considerably more to be said for the American viewpoint on reparations than Yergin allows, and the dispute was not as decisive as he claims. Since the rest of Eastern Europe was sovietized, it is hard to see why a special reason is needed to explain the creation of the East German regime. Walter Ulbricht's instructions to his henchmen in May 1945—"it's got to look democratic, but we must have everything in our control," aptly summarized Stalin's whole policy in the satellites. Korea was partitioned just like Germany, though the Soviets had few economic interests there, while the example of Austria shows that a Communist government was not necessary for the successful economic exploitation of an occupied area. Apparently deeming Austria too small to be divided, the Soviets permitted a democratic central government to operate in their zone. Austrian and Western protests failed to prevent the extraction of considerable resources under the guise of administering German assets.

Despite massive research into the American side, Yergin's study thus fails to give a full account because the author often ignores or fails to fully describe the Soviet policies to which the Western powers responded. It is difficult to take seriously the judgment implied in the book's subtitle. Yergin seems to feel that the most striking unpleasant feature of the Cold War has been, not the danger of a catastrophic war or the sufferings of millions under Communist rule and in

Other Preferences

" 'Shattered Peace' is one of the finest narrative histories of the early postwar era to date. This is Yergin's first book—he is 30 years old—but it is already clear that he is one of those rare historians who can bring the past to life on the page."

—*Newsweek*

"Daniel Yergin . . . has made *Shattered Peace* the most comprehensive examination of the *American* side of the U.S.-Soviet schism yet attempted."

Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Republic*

"The sanest, most vivid account of U.S.-Soviet relations."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"*Shattered Peace* is understated, reaching well beyond its author's modest promise of a narrative eschewing blame for the Cold War to provide considerable, often familiar, evidence of primary American responsibility for that bitter confrontation."

—*The Progressive*

"Daniel Yergin, author of 'Shattered Peace,' is by no means the first person to ask such questions—but few have asked them before in quite such a reasonable and persuasive tone of voice."

—*New York Times Book Review*

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local wars, but the necessity for a large American defense establishment. This seems to be the expression of an odd set of values, as is the idea that Stalin suddenly became a reasonable fellow when operating beyond the Soviet frontier. The truth of the matter is that the Second World War began with the Nazi conquest of Eastern Europe and ended with the Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe. There was no peace to be shattered. □

Games of a Precocious Mind

Mitchell Ross: *Literary Politicians;* Doubleday & Co., Inc.; New York, 1978.

by Paul Gottfried

The wonder of Mitchell Ross's book, according to many reviewers, is the author's precocious intellect. Having just passed his twentieth birthday at the time of the book's publication, Ross is already being hailed in the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune,* and elsewhere as an up-and-coming literary and philosophical celebrity. The judgment concerning his precocious intellectuality may be granted if one allows for a certain lumpiness in the mixture of parts. In an era of widespread illiteracy among college students, he indeed seems a miracle. Without doubt Mr. Ross does show a talent beyond his years in turning a phrase and rendering apparently weighty verdicts on his subjects yet, neither talent, in my opinion, can compensate for the all-pervasive shallowness of his judgments. Indeed his very facileness often permits him to avoid discussing questions of political and scholarly importance with the appropriate depth.

Ross seems particularly in his element evaluating the journalistic skills of politically conscious men of letters whom he sets out to treat: William Buckley, John Kenneth Galbraith, Arthur Schlesinger, Norman Mailer, Robert Lowell, Gore Vidal, and Henry Kissinger. He analyzes with vigor the texture of their prose and the tortuosities of their discourse. He offers a plausible case for why each of his subjects has gained literary and journalistic fame while making no genuinely original contribution to political theory. Nonetheless, Ross has little understanding of anything prior to his own lifetime—or of anything outside the cultural environment from which his own commentary has so unmistakably emerged. His abuse of labeling provides an irritating case in point. Characterizing William Buckley as a "romantic Catholic," he then explains Buckley's "Adam Smithianism" in the framework of his supposedly "romantic Catholic" outlook. Yet he seems unaware of the fact that romantic Catholics uniformly detested Adam Smith, having no use whatever for the free market. Both Buckley's economic views and individualist politics have their roots in the social contract theory of the Enlightenment. Moreover, if the Catholicism professed by Buckley is traditional, as Ross repeatedly suggests, there is no justification for calling it romantic. For the most part, romantics were pantheists while Catholic romantics have been denounced by the church for expressing heretical theology.

An obvious tension which Ross fails to note is that between Buckley's Catholic traditionalism on one side and his libertarian politics on the other. All the same, since Ross knows little about the intellectual history of the West, he has no way of tracing the pedigree of ideas. In his praise of Galbraith, for example, he identifies this economist of the Left with eighteenth century Scottish culture. Yet, he then proceeds to make an improbable comparison between his subject and the Tory philosopher David Hume. Little is made of the more obvious (though, in my opinion, equally faulty) parallel which has often been drawn between Galbraith and that innovative Scottish Whig Adam Smith. For Smith, a child of the Enlightenment and admirer of Jefferson and Franklin, has already been disposed of as a forerunner of Buckley's romantic, conservative Catholicism.

Ross then plunges into the world of philosophy, dismissing Kant, Hegel or the producers of "Germanic obscurantism." Although German thought is obviously not his bag, the author muddles through the chapter on Kissinger guided by one infallible guideline. Since all Germans are, as the current liberal wisdom would have it, fascist, turgid, or both, Kissinger's early theoretical writings can be simply categorized without being analyzed. Kissinger's *A World Restored* is judged to have been (would you guess it!) "a bloated Brucknerian symphony" and interrupted by way of psychoanalytical jargon. Almost all of Ross's expository weaknesses are made particularly apparent in his treatment of modern conservatism, or of what he styles somewhat unclearly the "New Conservatism." My complaint about this section is not his transparent contempt for most of the principles that he associates with the Right. Nor is it too upsetting that the author, once having proclaimed his allegiance to an imaginary political center, then inveighs against conservatives, while praising the liberal politics of Hope. Given the prevalent bias of our intellectual establishment, one can expect nothing else from a young social commentator currently enjoying the favor of the *New York Times.* Far more fatuous than his pretended neutrality is Ross's lack of intellectual curiosity about things which he alleges to understand.

The conservative movement is presented as a blend of anti-communism,

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traditional Christianity, and free market economics: as an alleged hodge-podge of metaphysical assumptions unrelated to the real world. No matter what the conservatives do, they are seen as either dumb, cruel, or intellectually inconsistent. When they defend capitalism, they callously disregard the poor. When *National Review* expresses concern about the low rate of mobility found among American Blacks, its editors are made to appear unfaithful to conservatism, which is by definition here a justification for human exploitation. Ross is especially obtuse in grasping an idea which he associates with William Buckley: that for liberals, unlike conservatives, "all moral questions are essentially procedural ones." Citing the fact that Buckley has proposed his own procedural reforms of taxation he then speaks of this as an example of the inconsistencies besetting that movement which Buckley represents.

In this particular case Ross displays ignorance of contexts as well as of history. Buckley's comment about liberals reducing substantive moral issues to procedural ones has little to do with balancing budgets for the city of New York. The criticism, whether right or wrong, was aimed at the supposed failure of liberals to recognize moral absolutes and to apply these in the form of social prescriptions to the body politic. This indictment, moreover, has its origin not in the New Conservatism, but in the European conservatism of the nineteenth century, whose exponents hurled it at their liberal opponents, who, incidentally, were the forerunners of today's free market conservatives. But, perhaps, such details seem useless to a nonchalant esthete who values more highly the sound of his phrases than the accuracy of his assertions.

Others' Taste

". . . the author has done his homework . . ."
—New York Times

"First, Ross is barely 22 years old and has a style, philosophy, and stance . . . Ross is a serious public man and not just a cheeky performer with poise beyond his years."
—Chicago Tribune Book World

"Undaunted by the variety and complexity of the books he undertakes to survey, critic Ross . . . goes right to the heart of the matter."
—New York Times Book Review

In addition to being culturally ignorant, Ross seems at times to be afflicted by amnesia. On page 33, for example, he mocks the New Conservatives for whom the communist threat is "an apparition more gruesomely fascinating than a Transylvanian vampire." Nonetheless, we are later told that the Soviet Union is tyrannical and imperialistic and, in fine, a fitting object for our suspicion. In one place Whittaker Chambers is judged without evidence to have been "pathological;" yet a few pages further, the author concedes the necessity for having removed Alger Hiss and other communist sympathizers from government service. Such about-faces, which are legion in the book, could have been avoided, had the author taken the time to edit more carefully. In fact other mistakes, too, might have been avoided if only Mr. Ross were less of what he is: a precocious journalist but a very young man without historical bearings or cultural roots. □

Commendables

What Price Correct Thinking?

Jim and Andrea Fordham: *The Assault on the Sexes;*
Arlington House; New Rochelle, New York, 1977.

by Nancy Mohrbacher

Andrea Fordham finally had enough. After years of being constantly bombarded by deficient thinking in the name of "women's lib" on the evening news and in the daily papers, she began to research the statistics, studies and human interest stories that grated against her common sense. The result is this joint venture by Andrea and her husband Jim. In it they succeed in pinpointing the reasons behind that vague, queasy feeling many of us have about the women's liberation movement without really knowing why. It has to be said to the Fordham team's credit that it has soberly and seriously brought some order into an area of social and moral tensions that has been formed by shrill slogans and proclivities peddled as "scientific" research and diagnoses.

Inherent in the feminist assumption that men and women are "equal" (which is not to be confused with "equal opportunity") is the denial of obvious physical, intellectual and emotional differences. This absurdity not only produces ludicrous situations when applied to daily life—such as army quotas which force traditional men's jobs on women who cannot even handle their tool boxes—but promotes the view that the individual is helpless against the conditioning of society. Indeed, much of the inflammatory feminist rhetoric is based upon a theory of "oppression" of women by men, who fashioned society in its current "sexist" form to assure their superiority. Such irrationalizing has gone so far that one feminist sociologist—as the Fordhams report—when faced with a study which shows that married women are happier than unmarried, explained with no qualms that:

". . . They have been told their happiness depends on marriage, so, even if they are miserable, they *are* married, aren't they? They *must* therefore be happy."

This attitude must inevitably lead to all sorts of aberrations of which the occupations traditionally assumed by

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women become a matter of senseless interpretation. And as any housewife can tell you, this has certainly been the case. No one is supposed to believe any longer that most women work as housewives or in clerical or teaching jobs because they *want* to—they are seen as hapless victims of a society which has allegedly exiled them to its lowest level. And those who choose these jobs can expect to be pitied and ridiculed.

For those who see the lib movement as merely an effort to expand women's options, the Fordhams include this recent quote by Simone de Beauvoir, one of lib's founders:

> "No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one . . ."

Also chronicled are Jim and Andrea's determined but unavailing efforts to present their case to the public through the media—who have accepted without question or debate the jargon and fallacious slant of feminism. But a TV movie which portrayed a middle-aged woman whose only proof of worth was her run in a marathon is readily broadcast and touted to astonished viewers. It seems we have no choice but to accept the thrashing of reason and humanness which characterizes the official standpoint of the media under the Liberal Establishment's domain.

In *The Assault on the Sexes* the Fordhams make a persuasive case for the richness and complexity of the traditional notions of man and woman and against the sophistry of libdom. By backing their viewpoints, as well as their criticisms, with sound logic and facts they provoke the wrath of those who live off sleazy theories and fantasies and who have managed to subdue the most potent devices of the American culture. The Fordham's effort will be ignored—which is the current price for correct thinking. □

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Revel's Plight

Jean-Francois Revel: *The Totalitarian Temptation;*
Translated by David Hapgood; Doubleday & Co., Inc.; Garden City, New York, 1977.

Jean-Francois Revel, French social critic and journalist of high repute, is currently the object of persecution in Paris, France, Europe. The savage forces of West-European radicalism, the cancerous tissue that continues to devour the few remaining democratic cultures in the continental democracy belt, are hellbent on destroying one of the last clear-thinking Frenchmen in the world. The rabid intolerance, nestled in periodicals, publishing houses, government-funded centers of "opinion," censor and censure the hapless rationalist, alter the message of his writing by adding derogatory texts to his books against his will, or without his knowledge, conceal the public demand for them, sabotage their delivery to bookstores. The cultists of deficient thinking, vandalizing Europe, seem to perceive a French intellectual, who dares to think scrupulously, as an evil that should be stamped out, all means being acceptable to the radical mind.

What's Revel's sin? He thinks that only the American capitalistic democracy, its imperfections notwithstanding, offers hope and dignity to mankind, and that any progressive change must stem from the improvement and evolution of a robust capitalistic system. He sees the system being constantly undermined by the same forces that are out to get him in Europe, and warns Americans about the danger. He trenchantly argues against radical mystifications and Marxian lies, he debunks the "moralists" who condemn democratic capitalism as socio-moral crime and are unable to see their own dissipation in the orgy of totalitarian counter-measures that have smothered the larger part of the planet with Stalinist, Maoist and other nightmares. *The Totalitarian Temptation* received a lukewarm welcome from the brethren of the U.S. "independent" liberal establishment, but a growing number of people who have read *Without Marx or Jesus,* Mr. Revel's first successful appearance in this country, will be delighted with his lucid ways of calling the nudity of the naked emperor to public attention. □

Von Mises Redivivus

Ludwig von Mises: *On the Manipulation of Money and Credit;*
Free Market Books, P.O. Box 298; Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1978.

Professor Ludwig von Mises was born in 1881 in Polish Galizia and died in 1973 in the United States. In between, he became one of the founders and leaders of what is known as the Austrian School of Economics, and he demolished Marxist economic theory in his numerous writings. The Austrian School was the incubator of great talents, e.g. Friedrich von Hayek and Joseph Schumpeter, but von Mises enjoyed in it the status of *primus inter pares.* He is today considered by many to be a giant of economic thought. Since *Human Action,* his monumental opus explaining the economic doctrine of human choices, was published in 1949, no free market economist in the world could claim to be unaware of or unsusceptible to his teachings. Milton Friedman and the entire roster of free enterprise theoreticians and practitioners is unthinkable without von Mises' influence. The sore point is that so many are unaware of it, as von Mises, a gentle scholar and unbending anti-Marxist, was sentenced to oblivion long ago by the liberal media. That his thought and his writings are almost inaccessible to anyone without a degree in economics does not help either. But for anyone who sees money as something more than a mysterious element of happiness or despair, located in wallets, checkbooks and cash registers, the title above may be of enormous interest. □

Commendables
continued on following page.

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In Defense of Moral Sensitivities

David Holbrook: *Education, Nihilism, and Survival;*
Darton, Longman and Todd; London, 1977.

Contemporary culture tends to corrupt human sensibility rather than refine it. This destructive trend has taken its particular toll in the field of education. When the humanities can be perceived as nothing more than a political means to "rock the boat," when a student can get a degree in philosophy without ever undergoing a philosophical experience, where the very critics of words and notions, who act in the name of culture, deny that the obscene even exists—then there remains precious little in culture to protect against the treason of the intellectuals.

Professor Holbrook, who writes from England, develops this argument in a convincing display of familiarity with his own discipline of literature. He also displays a peripheral vision remarkably acute in tracing the ideas of our age to their cultural consequences. He delivers a solid indictment against the effort of the nihilist elite to reduce the realm of truth to what they can identify "objectively." Basing his critique largely on phenomenology, Professor Holbrook lays the foundation for a reconstruction of the cultural wasteland relying on Husserl and Maslow and their intellectual preeminence.

He succeeds in challenging the very foundation of the nihilist program, calls on Polanyi to show that man's knowledge is inseparable from man's relationship with himself and reality: that the Cartesian dichotomy between subjective man and objective reality wreaks havoc on man's delicate relationship to truth.

However, as an "atheistic humanist," Holbrook carries on this critique on the level of a philosophical anthropology which relies on ethical norms independent of any religious or traditional foundation. In one sense, this makes his effort all the more admirable, since he attacks the nihilists on their own ground of secular science. While he continually admonishes his colleagues to respect the mysteries inherent in reality, he never attempts to invoke his "private" interpretation of those mysteries. Thus, on a more fundamental level of analysis, his substantive conclusion pales in strength. His constant message, that we need to solve human problems with a love motivated by humanistic values, is devoid of the historical dimension of experience. He seems not to have noticed that our moral sensitivities are indeed the ongoing articulation of the Judeo-Christian tradition which, after all, is the ultimate target of the nihilist destroyers. □

In Focus

Kafka's Touch

Franz Kafka: *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors;*
Translated by Richard and Clare Winston; Schocken Books; New York, 1977.

Kafka's touch is his intensity of intuition. Since his first slim volumes hit mankind at large, after World War II, the endless pondering of his role by the Kafka intellectual industry quite correctly ends in the inevitable question: who was he, or who is he as perceived in the context of his complete work? An exegete or a prophet? Or both? For the fact that we deal with someone who was (or is) much more than a writer can hardly be questioned any longer.

A man constructed of the most painful complexities, sensitivities and vulnerabilities of his heritage and epoch, Kafka devised an unsurpassed method of insights into and recognition of modern metaphysics. An inimitable clarity of vision, his own way of illuminating what seems to us deeply enigmatic in human condition, has raised him to the category of humanity's great teachers. Having established himself as thus in our awareness, he has no difficulty in commanding our attention to any aspect of his personality and life, any shade of his reflection. Letters to relatives and friends do not always mirror the genius. However, listing the trivia of existence and giving them a chiseled dimension becomes a striking feature of Kafka's thought and style in this collection of private writing, as it was present in the previously published volumes of letters to the two women he loved. These pages, apart from giving delight to scholars and literary gourmets, may still provide an unassuming reader with unexpected, though melancholy, consolations. □

Waste of Money

McGovern's Self-Examination

George McGovern: *Grassroots;*
Random House; New York, 1977.

Half-way through the book, one realizes what's wrong with this autobiography: it does not examine the author's self, nor his beliefs, nor even his life. It records events, thoughts and endeavors in a sterile way, it approaches reality in a style appropriate to regulations and manuals, that is, one which eliminates both uncertainty and enthusiasm as human factors. Later, the reader wonders why and how such a nice person as Senator McGovern could support so many utterly awful things, and how such an exemplar of sobermindedness could have misunderstood so many issues and circumstances which he claimed to have a full grasp of. Finally, one leaves the book with a sense of surprise that its author knows so little about what he defends and what he condemns—which gives one a comfortable feeling that in 1972 we avoided something much worse than Watergate. □

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Gornick's Machinations

Vivian Gornick: *The Romance of American Communism;*
Basic Books; New York, 1978.

A new and calamitous trend is observable—so unsavory and brash that it cannot be downplayed as the usual liberal reveling in deficient thinking. It appears as if some of the New York publishers—bastions of the libcultural establishment—have embarked on a geared-up crusade to glorify the not-too-distant past of American communism.* Why? For what reasons?

The answers can only be speculated on. Quite likely, the Carter human rights campaign, though a half-hearted enterprise, does focus upon what's going on behind the Iron Curtain (what an old-fashioned but precise term!)—despite the media's bustling efforts to concentrate the public's attention on South Africa, Rhodesia and Chile. The communist stereotype, colored with tawdry ideological bauble, so attractive in the past to juvenile hotheads, seems to have lost its attraction and requires refurbishing by old experienced ideological operators. They know how to do it. Last year, the disgusting Jessica Mitford memoir—all coyness and cuteness in portraying lies and misdeeds as idealistic meanderings—made good in bookshops and among reviewers, was nominated for literary awards, got prodigious publicity. Ms. Mitford was supported by a Rockefeller grant to write her cynical and mendacious tale of an allegedly abused ideological virginity. One has to assume, therefore, that, after all those years, enough former comrades, and fellow-travelers and sympathizers, are sitting in the vital nooks and crannies of the liberal establishment to lubricate the cultural machine with old loyalties. Thanks to them, the efforts of other Mitfords run smoothly—innocent minds get contaminated, truths deformed, and socio-political fibs spread under the guise of literary sincerity.

Enter Ms. Gornick who proves that there is, indeed, a new method at work, that the old pros have discovered the uselessness of agitation and of non-stop hammering into people's heads the utter idiocies about the moral and economic superiority of communism over capitalism and democracy. Her gimmick is a pseudo-sophisticated sentimentality. According to her findings, communists, or former communists beset with nostalgia, were and are the helpless victims of powerful emotions. They fell in love with an ideal of irresistible beauty, so they cannot be held responsible for the follies of desire. *The New York Times Book Review* accorded Ms. Gornick for this earth-shaking, as well as subtle, insight the exceptional honor of printing an excerpt from her *oeuvre* before its publication, thus giving it invaluable advertising. In it we read: "... *responsible* for the whole of things was the longing, the longing aroused by the vision of loveliness that was Marxism." (emphasis added) Responsible for *what?* For 20 million murdered Russians, God knows how many Chinese, for enslaving nations, ruining their societies, bringing misery and degradation to countless people? Even before its first implementation, Marxism was effectively criticized and exposed; after its Russian embodiment, endless testimonies have been provided to prove that Marxism creates slavery and hell. But the American communists chose freely and deliberately *not* to listen to that evidence and to do everything they could to inflict communism on America. They declared Lenin, Stalin, and Mao to be leaders, teachers and prophets and Senator McCarthy a blood-thirsty monster. Granted, McCarthy practiced crude zealotry, but he did *not* kill anyone. The "prophets" ordered the executions of millions, wallowed in human blood, and later failed on their promises. History has *already* demonstrated their heinousness and the catastrophes they brought upon mankind. Now Ms. Gornick comes and declares that blindly loving them was ennobling and should be regarded as proof of tender emotionality. In her mind, Stalin will loom forever only as a deceiver, but McCarthy as a lethal thug. "Recommended for most libraries"—the *Library Journal,* the liberal adviser of American public libraries, passes its mature judgment on her book.

Which leaves us with the same old questions: does the fact that their passion was sincere exonerate their service to the cause of evil? And what about those who did not serve evil? Will *their* accounts of how they knew evil as evil be displayed in the front pages of the *New York Times?* Where's their place in history? Is it applause for their wisdom when the liberal establishment, which governs the biggest chunk of the American opinion, acclaims the Mitfords and Gornicks not for their penitence and readiness to fight for truth, but for weepy self-pity over lost innocence? People who combatted the communism of Ms. Gornick and her heroes in the '30s, '40s, '50s, if they are still alive, are saying the same things now that they were saying then. And, strangely enough, they are now, as then, considered war-mongers, hard-liners, crazies and cold-warriors by those who today are promoting the Mitfords, Gornicks, etc. These writers, in turn, will never admit that numberless people, from Chambers to Trilling, from Nixon to Kristol, were right and correct when they spoke of communism. The latter will remain their enemies forever because they never worshiped false gods. Or because they recognized communism's hideousness early enough to march forthrightly against it. □

*Since the beginning of 1978, Basic Books has published Gornick, Simon & Schuster has come up with David Caute's *The Great Fear: the anti-Communist purge under Truman and Eisenhower,* and University of Massachusetts Press brought out Mary Sperling McAuliffe's *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947-1954.*

Waste of Money
continued on the following page.

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Kramnick's Burke

Isaac Kramnick: *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative;*
Basic Books; New York, 1977.

Prof. Kramnick seems to be another casualty of the epidemic raging among liberal scholars—the *dementia sexualis.* Its symptoms are easily discernible: an academic person, mostly in the field of humanities, feverishly begins to trace the conception of ideas, art, social movements, historical facts, as well as the behavior of historical figures, solely to the genitals of all involved. An entire generation of scholarly hustlers and playboys appear to be in the making.

In other times, students amused themselves spinning theories about battles lost because of emperors and field marshals having been caught with their pants down; or about poets whose exclamations of grief or outrage were stimulated by a merciless itching in the parts of their personalities most unsuited for a source of poetry. We tended to see it in a sophomoric pastime. This century's debate on whether the genitals engender and conceive more than just other humans began with some features of seriousness. Freud attributed to those instruments an uncanny power to generate dreams and neuroses, and discovered their indirect relation with many human endeavors, from creativeness to crime. But the American scholarly playboy's fascination with them of late seems to have skipped Freud and gotten out of hand. Prof. Kramnick illustrates the failing: the bombastic pretentiousness and unctuous empathy with which he elaborates on "real" Burke and his *faiblesse,* rather well known before his book, border on caricature. "There is an air of plausibility which accompanies vulgar reasonings and notions, taken from the beaten circle of ordinary experience, that is admirably suited to the narrow capacities of some . . ." Burke wrote in the preface to the second edition of *A Vindication of Natural Society,* published in 1757. These words read today as a trenchant anticipation of the libcultural climate in America of the '70s. It is doubtful, however, whether the Kramnicks will ascribe their relevance to themselves. Most likely, they will see in them the expression of troubled glands. □

Screen

The Impossibility of Being Dispassionate

***The Turning Point;* directed by Herbert Ross; written by Arthur Laurents; 20th Century Fox.**

by Eric Shapearo

This is a perfect mediocrity of a movie. It is written with a mediocre sense of melodrama, and directed with the mediocre skills of a cinematic craftsman. It displays, at moments, interesting camera work, and, throughout, the habitually acceptable performances of old Hollywood hands—Anne Bancroft and Shirley MacLaine. The picture's human message is smoothly tailored into inoffensive and not unpleasant platitudes about the difficulties of existential choices. Mediocre banalities flow incessantly from the screen to the audience. And in the midst of this fiesta of mediocrity, dance sequences dazzle as performed by Mikhail Baryshnikov, perhaps the greatest living ballet dancer. They are couched in first-rate imagery by the best choreographers and stage and costume designers in New York. To be sure, the ballet element is suffused with what can be termed glamorized realism—a relatively new Hollywood concoction that mixes tinsel with slickly conceptualized truth: the ballerinas are covered with perspiration, their feet with blisters, but life in their environment seems to be reduced to rather modish stereotypes about the sexual routines and traps of success, no more profound than the chaste tearjerkers of the early '50s.

There is, however, one aspect of the movie which bothers at least this reviewer. Can, should, or ought, a critic as well as the regular movie watcher, who knows more about Miss MacLaine than is conveyed by her performance, remain unbiased toward her presence on screen? A difficult and complex question, though all too easy answers can be delivered from the standpoint of the enlightened toleration, liberal righteousness, progressive sanctimony. How could a viewer be affected by the actor's political attitude? Isn't it solely the actor's art that counts? Isn't she or he fully entitled to take any position she or he wishes, without generating any feelings in us other than those stimulated by the acting itself? Of course, he and she is, and the public cannot demand that one become an ideological neuter because of one's profession or vocation. Nonetheless, it is not a matter of substance or logic, but of a specific degree of exposure as given by the liberal media to those who espouse the predominant liberal philosophies. The more so as Miss MacLaine is far beyond the liberal range of colors—she is an unabashed communist sympathizer who spouts dimwitted slogans about Maoist China or Ho Chi Minh Vietnam—all of them alacritously relayed to the common folks by the liberal establishment. Miss MacLaine told a receptive *New York Times* reporter that she recently visited Cuba, where she spoke about *The Turning Point* with Cuban women who ". . . told me 'we don't understand your part . . . why did the character you play give up her work to get married?' " And Miss MacLaine adds: "Fidel is very strong about women's rights—two years ago, they made it part of the Cuban Constitution that men have to do 50% of the housework there . . ." So Miss

Eric Shapearo feels impressed by movies, on occasion, but never by stars.

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MacLaine chirps idiocies for which every woman in the socialist countries, who is not employed by the secret police or the party's propaganda outlets, would stone her on the spot, and which the *New York Times News Service* reporter enthusiastically conveys to the rest of America, while the ultra-liberal *Tempo* pages of the *Chicago Tribune* immediately hasten to echo with a reprint of such a trustworthy interview. Incidentally, *The Turning Point* was the first American movie to be officially shown in Cuba in 17 years, obviously because of Miss MacLaine's friendship with Mr. Castro, and anyone who knows a little bit about communist "cultural freedom" can imagine the communist reviews, in which capitalist America is condemned for making it impossible for women to be ballet dancers and mothers of three at the same time. And between the communist reviewers and *New York Times* interviewers, the truth about what a Cuban woman would give for the "oppression" under which Deedee, Miss MacLaine's movie character, lives, for her furniture, kitchen, cars, and cosmetics that prolong her MacLaine looks past forty (as no woman under communism dreams of looking this way after 30, unless she happens to have married Tito or Yevtushenko) gets hoplelessly lost.

But the liberal interviewer is not satisfied with Miss MacLaine's love for Cuba and suggests that perhaps Nixon is guilty of persecuting her as an artist—to which Miss MacLaine gently agrees, though pointing out that ". . . when I was on the enemies list and . . . everybody knew it, I don't think that I didn't work because of *that* . . ." She does not spell out that *because* of *that* she was touted and promoted by every media outlet in America, her words were trumpeted through the feminist press, while her autobiographies were pushed by the liberal reviewers up to the best-seller lists. Her opposition to what most of us consider the heart of America was for her a money-making enterprise.

A Polish actress of rather more serious dimension than Miss MacLaine, whom the Western press has featured of late, comes to mind. Her name is Halina Mikolajska and she is considered to be the best interpreter of Shakespeare and Ibsen in Eastern Europe. But she dared to oppose the Warsaw communist regime and spoke out against the torturing and murdering of Polish workers held by the Polish secret police after the wave of recent labor unrest and strikes in the Polish factories. Miss Mikolajska was arrested by the communist authorities, beaten during interrogations, released, thrown out of her apartment, which as any other is owned by the Polish government, and permanently deprived of any opportunity to work. This is just one example of an actress's fate in *this* communism which seems to Miss MacLaine worthy of extolling in the *New York Times*—and let's not forget that Poland compared to Fidel's Cuba is considered a model of a free society.

Thus, even if *The Turning Point* may be seen as an inoffensive movie—the very presence of Miss MacLaine on screen makes it, at least for this reviewer, somehow offensive. *The Turning Point* does not exist in a vacuum. The promotional hoopla of the film and star has a life of its own by which the public is used and abused. □

Journalism

Chicago Tribune's Semantics

Semantics means, among other things, the study of the correspondence between words and reality. Reading today's newspapers, we begin to wonder if we *do* all use the same language to define the same reality. A *Chicago Tribune* rock critic—a puzzling occupation as rock music, by its own credo, appeals to impulses and instincts, while criticism is a function of reason—writing about the Sex Pistols, the latest effluvium of the rock subculture, sets them against "the British establishment." In one sense, they *are* the British establishment, and morally far inferior to the old colonial one. They earn astronomical amounts of money, hold sway over a large, brainless and manipulable following, prescribe behavior and fashion, and exercise bigotry, even physical terror, against those who disapprove of them. Anyone who, in the impoverished Britain of today, vomits just for fun in the waiting lobby of the Heathrow Airport, and can afford to pay for the clean-up, has overcome, if indeed he hasn't replaced, the British establishment.

The *Tribune's* critic sees an anti-establishmentarian feature in the Pistols' use of "naughty words" in public. But "naughty" words constitute, these days, the very fabric of almost every dialogue in the movies, even those rated R (under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). This means that the kids in the audience can listen to everything if they are brought by parents, relatives, mature teachers, governesses or wet nurses to the movie house. Movies portraying lives of university scholars, political heroes and society's most beautiful people are studded with obscenities, formerly shunned even by irate drill sergeants. Profanity has become the official tongue of the establishment. Or, rather the real, power-wielding establishment *is* those who talk in four letter words. □

Chicago Tribune Book World's Sympathies

From your enlightened, evenhanded, liberal, broadminded, impartial, fair, reasonable, moderate, cool, middle-of-the-road, serious, responsible, leading Sunday cultural caterer, the *Chicago Tribune's* book section, where a certain Mr. Walton, a Henry Wallace panegyrist, reviews the notorious *The Romance of*

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American Communism (see page 23 of this issue), of a Vivian Gornick, a former and not-too-repentant communist:

> "For 25 years I've been waiting for this book . . . What a splendid, moving book has resulted. A book of such quality that it alone would justify a lifetime of writing . . . Americans saw the Communist Party as a monolith composed of verminous sub-humans: subversives, traitors, defilers of all America stood for. They were pictured—often by those who should have been most aware of the falsity of this collective portrait—as political animals who were fair game to be hounded mercilessly and routinely deprived of their basic rights as citizens . . . Gornick has revived them as ordinary, which is to say as extraordinary for, as Gornick brings them to life in these crowded, lively pages, the Communists were often our *best* people." (Emphasis added) □

Time's Operational Hypocrisy

After years of avid participation in the anti-CIA witch hunt, *Time,* in a recent cover story on intelligence agencies, featured this flabbergasting sentence:

> "There even seems to be a swing of public opinion in support of the CIA, a recognition of the basic point that it is not a contradiction for an open democracy to have a secret intelligence agency."

The anti-intelligence campaign began, some years ago, with the aggressive and predatory articles of Seymour Hersh in the *New York Times.* Soon, Senator Frank Church began his investigation. Even those free societies with longer democratic traditions than America had troubles with intelligence. But history records no instances which equal the spectacle of mindless destruction, callous disregard for national interest and catering to a potential enemy for reasons of commercial sensationalism which have taken place recently in the U.S. The role of the American media in this affair is reminiscent of an inebriated butcher who performed brain surgery with an assortment of cleavers. People were irrevocably wronged, complex and vital relationships destroyed, years of capital investment in the national security and social confidence annihilated.

Now *Time,* by suggesting that the public opinion had something to do with all that, wants to make the American public a part of the wanton devastation, perpetrated solely by the media as in a spectacular trance. Actually, the media's rage and outrage seemed to many a giant show, a put-on, in which civic and noble indignation was just a guise from behind which the media, with a gimlet-eyed sobriety, scouted for self-promotion and the enhancement of their power. And, currently, *Time,* with a coquettish insolence, reports that Americans *have changed* their minds. But *what* has been the opinion of American citizens of the anti-CIA frenzy? Did anybody ask? When and where did Americans express their views on all that went on? How many letters to the editor in favor of the CIA did *Time* throw into the wastebasket? Did *Time* never notice that the writing, judging, condemning, blabbing, reporting, accusing, inferring and concluding was initiated and largely sustained by the media? □

Polemics & Exchanges

On Vietnam

The war ended in 1975, and now the literature starts flowing. It took a decade before this occurred after World War I. Barbusse, Hašek, Graves, Dos Passos, Zweig, Hemingway, Remarque came on the scene, and their condemnation of insanity and cruelty was simplistic and noble, strongly motivated by, or fully submitted to, the Marxist interpretation of history. World War II fermented a shorter time in writers' souls, and soon Mailer, Waugh, Jones, Vailland, Merle, Nekrasov, Malaparte, Irving Shaw appeared in the bookstores. They projected a more complex view of historical forces and individual destinies than the previous generation. The ideological Nemesis and man's murky passions replaced Marxist clichés in their work. In return for this refinement, their moral attitudes became less pure, their introspections were often tainted by a shrewd lassitude. They learned to call their stance existentialism and longed to be seen by the world as nonchalant sages, perhaps even latter-day stoics.

Now, Vietnam's imprints on sensibilities have begun to turn into literary testimonies. Vietnam was chiefly an American affair, thus, unless something worthy of attention comes from Indochina, the literature of that war must depend on American reactions and insights. No one on the order of Barbusse, Mailer, or even Remarque has yet made a debut. Most remarkably—no novel of importance has surfaced. It appears that the massive journalistic reporting of the war, which ranged from manic impressionism to lyrical exposures, has replaced those literary forms which were most effectively used to portray war and its dilemmas. Last year, Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War,* a personalized reportage from the Vietnam battle front, attracted more reverence than this kind of writing usually does. Then, the National Book Award panel—an esoteric body, recognizable only by the ideological uniformity and conformity of its members—nominated Michael Herr's *Dispatches* for that coveted prize. Once again, it is *not* a novel; but in the liberal press it has been met with acclaim, usually reserved for works of art. *Chronicles of Culture* reviews Mr. Herr's book in this issue, but it seems that the event deserves additional remarks.

What happened in Vietnam has already been given many interpretations. We offer another. To our mind, American liberals seem to have decided, initially, to defend democracy, a Judeo-Christian-Hellenic political notion, in Asia. The Asian array of civilizations and cultures had been grounded in philosophies and

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creeds remote from Western ones, however, to make things even worse, American liberals supposed freedom and democracy to be synonymous, and proclaimed, quite arbitrarily, that freedom could not survive without democracy in Asia—a rather naive supposition. It did not work, and in the process of losing the war, freedom, a concept basically divorced from democracy in most of Asia, went down the drain.

Nowhere was the cult of deficient thinking so omnipresent as on the Vietnam War scene that stretched from Saigon and the Mekong Delta to the American editorial offices and university campuses. The world, Western civilization, and the logic of political justice for the masses oppressed by communism in Europe, needed avenging. People in Warsaw, Prague, Leningrad and Sofia prayed for American intransigence as the just retribution for their sufferings. For her part, America chose the role of a noble sinner and permitted itself to transform unexamined emotions and plain defeatism into a morality play. One of the most bizarre episodes in the history of war occurred when, in the midst of the war, American notables of the anti-war movement began pilgrimages to the enemy's capital, where they eagerly volunteered to serve the enemy's propaganda. They saw themselves as apostles of compassion, fairness, impartiality, and many in this country saw them as such. They have not yet understood that their smiling, polite Vietnamese hosts considered them consummate idiots, in the same way that Stalin had contempt for such beacons of the liberal conscience as G.B. Shaw and Eleanor Roosevelt while the Soviet press sang their praises. The only Americans who were taken seriously and respected by the Vietnamese were the tortured prisoners who refused to give in.

In the years since the war, a cultural terrorism has regulated American public discourse of the conflict. One can write and speak about Vietnam only in terms of a preordained recognition that it was a mindless, needless agony. It remains a puzzle why America, a nation that owes its successes to common sense, open reasoning, and audacious compromise, allows this failure to be discussed only in terms of psychotic self-incrimination, self-flagellation and self-destructiveness. Mr. Herr's book adds new dimensions to the pathology of Vietnam literature. He sees the war through the categories and criteria of rock music. In one sense, it is an apt metaphor. Just as the Vietnam war was virtually a non-war which our military forces were not permitted to try to win, rock music borders on non-music, especially the acid rock of the late '60s. If jazz was a prolific and meaningful product of American culture, rock began as the bastardization of jazz's musical syndrome, and rapidly came to mirror the degeneration of the era in which trendiness passed for actual cultural product. Barbarism and brutality of expression were substituted for what jazz had established as emotional or social sensitiveness. Rock is music that has been reduced to physiology, just the way rebellion in the '60s degenerated into twaddle. Mr. Herr appears, therefore, as a refugee from the '60s in an age which painfully strives for maturity. We believe the truth about the Vietnam War has not yet been distilled in his book. And when it finally is, it will still have plenty of trouble getting into print and on the screen.

"Quite simply, *Dispatches* is the best book to have been written about the Vietnam War—" the *New York Times Book Review* announced on its front page in a lead article. Perhaps. The reviewer then proceeds to quote an excerpt to support his claim. In it, Mr. Herr describes reflections flashing through his mind while coming under fire and finishes with: ". . . It was the feeling you'd had when you were much, much younger and undressing a girl for the first time." This, the *N. Y. Times* reviewer provides with a comment: "Vietnam required not only new techniques of warfare, but *new* techniques in writing as well." (Emphasis added) But is there anything "new" in the quoted sentence? The metaphor which links the baptism of fire and lost virginity is as old as the literature of warfare and it would be hard to find someone in the post-Remarquian war novel industry who didn't indulge in that connotation. There are examples that go back as far as the *Nibelungenlied* and *Chanson de Geste* which intimate, in a pre-Freudian way, that battle and sex somehow connect in man's soul. However, an imposing number of the greatest poets and writers mankind has produced have expressed quite a different view.

What this means is that Mr. Herr brings nothing new to what we already know, and that we are still waiting for someone to tell us convincingly whether we were wrong or right in Vietnam, and what was senseless and what was not. *(LT)* □

About *The Rockford Papers*

The Rockford Papers is a bi-monthly publication of the Rockford College Institute. It challenges the mixture of idealism and prejudices which, under the name of liberalism, now virtually dictates the beliefs and sympathies of so many. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, Hollywood millionaire radicalism and the Manhattan publishing industry all subscribe to this ideology. Thus, our efforts to offset the radical snobberies and the moral malignancy of the jaded, super wealthy "social reformers" may seem insignificant and even naive.

But we firmly believe in the forces of well tested ideas and mature consideration. The history of the western world has confirmed repeatedly that intellectual choices rooted in moral responsibility—even if long stifled by the pageants of cynical sophistry and impressive inanities—will slowly but inevitably triumph.

Each issue of *The Rockford Papers* is devoted to the examination and clarification of ideas, ideological choices, social trends, value-and-image-forming cultural movements. We are trying to offer useful perspective for those who believe as we do that our lives are determined by the character of the culture. We recognize that the power of culture to shape our existence is now controlled by people who have little concern about what is salutary for society and ultimately for themselves.

We hope we can be helpful to those who wish to change this state of affairs.

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